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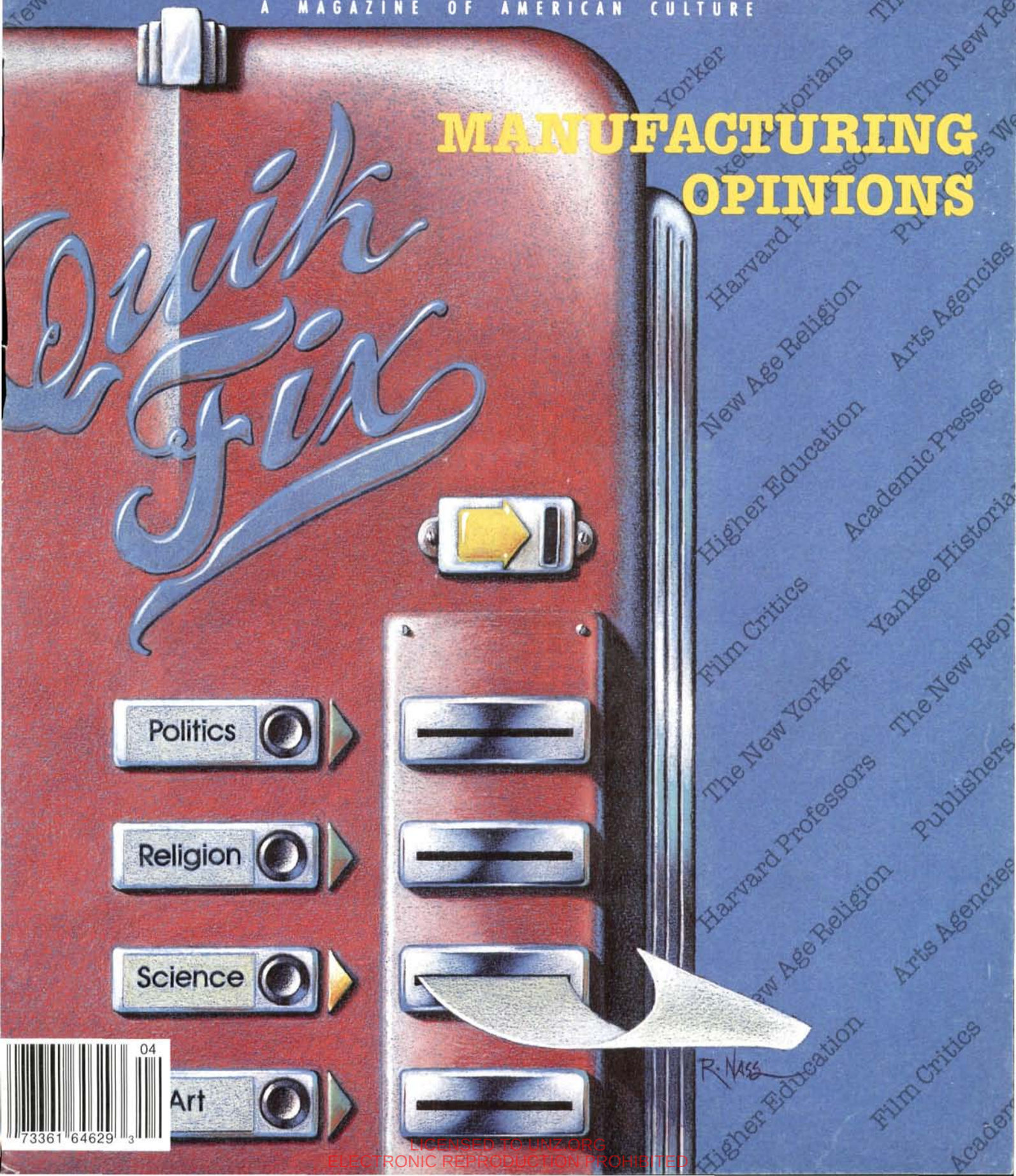

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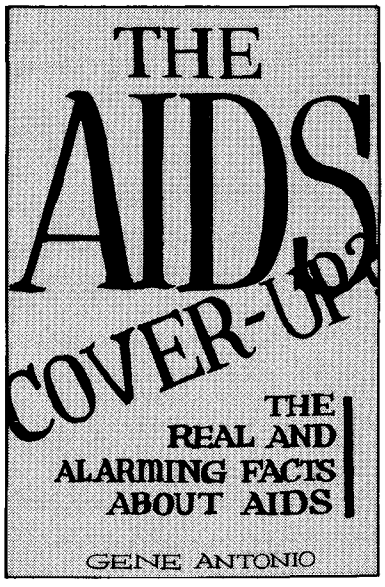

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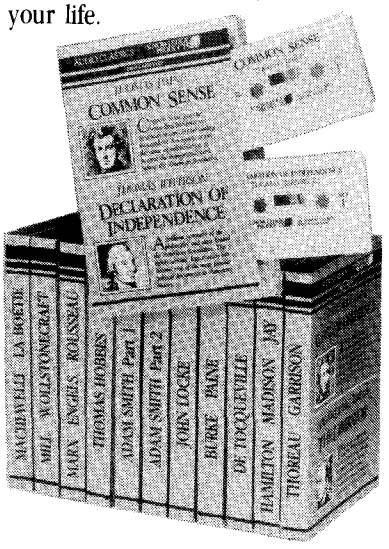

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A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

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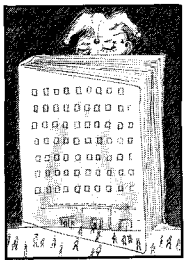

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On the Cover

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American GNP grew by about 3 percent or less in 1986 according to current estimates. Almost everyone would like to see figures slightly higher—say 4 percent or 5 percent. But many analysts feel reasonably comfortable with 1986's lackluster yet apparently solid growth. Unfortunately, much of the growth in our GNP in recent years has been illusory—as artificial as walnut veneer on pasteboard. Honest GNP figures would show a far bleaker economic picture.

The problem is that we are now measuring as GNP "growth" the one-time effect of the movement of women into the workplace. Services—cooking, child care, sewing, cleaning—that women used to provide "free" for their families are now bought and paid for. As a result, they are counted for the first time in our GNP. In 1986, the GNP included approximately $5 billion paid to the nation's 1.6 million child-care workers. Just a decade ago, the amount spent on child care was almost negligible, though there were actually more children being cared for in American homes. Similarly, the 1984 GNP included $124 billion in restaurant meals, up dramatically from just $44 billion in 1974, with fast-food sales making up most of the increase. But are we really a wealthier nation because we now eat at McDonald's instead of at home and pay to have our children cared for?

Analysts admit that America's "smokestack" industries have declined steeply in recent years. In 1982, for the first time, more Americans were employed in service industries than in manufacturing. In its 1986 survey of U.S. industry, *Business Week* worried about "the decline in overall manufacturing activity." "Are we going to retain a manufacturing base?" wondered one business executive interviewed by *BW* editors. Nearly two million American manufacturing jobs have disappeared since 1979, and in many formerly prosperous steel-mill towns, hundreds line up to get jobs delivering mail or selling groceries.

But some economists argue that the rapid growth of America's "service industries" has more than made up for the slide in heavy industry. After all, the GNP is still going up, isn't it? Syndicated columnist Donald Lambro particularly hails the movement of women entrepreneurs into the "fastest-growing sector" of our economy. But the replacement of blue-collar jobs with pink-collar positions is changing our economy in troubling ways. For one thing, the female-headed entrepreneurial firms described by Lambro typically provide services or consumer luxuries—nanny services, for instance, or "home-style" pies and cookies or clever toys—that we would probably do without during an economic downturn.

And the most recent figures from the U.S. Department of Commerce suggest that most women are not up-and-coming entrepreneurs. Instead, the occupations dominated by women—secretarial, nursing, child care, sales, and elementary education—are mostly service-oriented and usually poorly paid. As the female fraction of the nation's workforce climbed from 35 percent in 1960 to 44 percent in 1985, the services component of our GNP made a remarkably parallel jump of 38 percent to 49 percent.

Some observers are also beginning to worry about the long-term economic effects of a birthrate that has fallen well below the Zero Population Growth (ZPG) level as more and more women have left the home. A GNP that rises off the chart may provide no staying power for a nation that must import not only its steel but also its babies.

Writing recently in the *Washington Post*, the University of Maryland economist Frank Levy argued that "for the past decade and longer, Americans have been living an illusion of increasing prosperity." Levy believes that we have maintained that illusion through unprecedented social realignments: "more women working; postponement of marriage among the young; low birthrates; and a great willingness . . . to take on debt." Now, says Levy, "most of the choices are exhausted," and we have created a debt-laden service economy in which "normal productivity growth is difficult."

American women can only make one massive movement out of the home into the workplace. Within the next few years, that movement will be virtually complete. After that, the at-home meal and the at-home preschooler will be rarities, and it will be impossible to pump up our GNP any more by building more fast-food restaurants and day-care centers. The traditional functions of the home will largely have been replaced by service industries. When the structural weaknesses in our economy start poking through, we will no longer be able to hide the problem by putting more housewives to work.

—*Bryce Christensen*

At-large representation has become a major civil rights issue in recent years, one that is not likely to go away. Only days after a U.S. District Court ruled Springfield, Illinois, in violation of the Federal Voting Rights Act, civil rights activists in Danville (IL) filed suit. At

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issue in Illinois and many other states is the method of electing local government officials. In a classic ward system, members of a city council are elected from the neighborhood districts they represent. The smaller the district, the more susceptible the councilman is to pressure from constituents. In an at-large system, however, all the voters vote for all the councilmen (or commissioners). In a city like Springfield, where blacks make up just a little more than 10 percent of the population, the white majority maintains an effective monopoly on public office.

Defenders of at-large representation argue that it was never designed to exclude minority representation. This is not entirely true. In fact, at-large elections became popular early in this century precisely because they reduced the power of ethnic leaders and neighborhood politicians. Upper- and middle-class civic leaders were alarmed by the flood of immigrants who did not take even a generation to learn how to muscle their way into urban politics. Cities like Chicago and Milwaukee, which had small districts and large councils, soon found Irish, Italian, and even black aldermen bargaining for a bigger piece of the pie. The result was a complex system of patronage and pull that drew each new wave of immigrants into the political process.

In the name of good government and municipal reform, liberals and progressives took steps to reduce the influence of ward heelers and ethnic voting blocks. More cautious cities simply increased the size of an alderman's district and drew the lines carefully to make sure the district did not coincide with ethnic neighborhoods. The more radical solution was at-large elections, which were going to eliminate all the problems of crooked government and usher in a period of uninterrupted honesty and prosperity for all.

Not exactly. So long as men are men, politicians will be politicians. A councilman at large is no more honest or intelligent than an alderman elected from a ward. The only difference is that while the alderman typically lives in his district and has to face, every day, constituents who want to know what he's doing about the garbage pickup or the potholes in Elm Street, the at-large councilman or commissioner only has to please himself and a handful of colleagues. Given the reality of urban politics, which type of dishonest councilman would most of us prefer: one who is only out for himself and his cronies or one who has

REVISIONS

The Decline of a Radical

Michael Katz is among the most interesting and fair-minded radical historians at work today. His studies of public education and welfare policies have gone far in debunking the progressive myths of American social history. In *The Irony of Early School Reform*, Katz demonstrated that, for Massachusetts at least, public schooling was not a response to working class demands or even a vehicle for social advancement. School reform, in particular, was a powerful tool for assimilating immigrants and controlling the lower orders.

While Katz approaches his subjects from a position so far out in left field he has to sit in the bleachers, his books—stripped of the rhetorical excesses—are a critical and lucid introduction to the history of social policy. It was with high hopes, therefore, that we took up his most recent book, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, $22.95). The early chapters, in large measure, live up to expectations. Katz painfully traces the attack on outdoor relief, which left the poor in possession of freedom and dignity, and the corresponding rise of the poorhouse, the orphanage, and scientific charity. The very same issues being debated in the 1980's were already being disputed in the 1880's: how to distinguish the deserving poor from the simply lazy, how to liberate children from the culture of poverty, how to be charitable without creating a dependent class. By and large, the arguments of progressives and reformers are now being echoed by conservatives.

Even the family was a hot topic 100 years ago. Outdoor relief served to keep families together, but many reformers preferred a system of poorhouse and orphanage that separated children from the bad influence of poor parents. Eventually, even the progressives realized that most children were even worse off in institutions, but that recognition did not retard the intrusion of child-savers into family life.

Katz goes over some ground already traveled by Christopher Lasch, among others: the professionalization of nurture and the rise of centralized urban governments as dispensers of social services. It is here that the radical vision begins to falter. Katz, of all people, ought to deplore the bureaucratic welfare state as an elitist monopoly. Instead, near the end, he seems to go soft and sentimental in order to defend the practice of welfare against what he imagines are "conservative" critics (e.g., Charles Murray). In his conclusion, Katz is as entrenched a New Dealer as, say, George Will.

There is, quite frankly, no excuse for a welfare system that creates a bureaucracy of overpaid busybodies who skim off as much as 75¢ from every welfare dollar. If people need our help, by all means let us give them the money. We can afford it. In the long run, a negative income tax would be far cheaper than the nightmare of housing projects, AFDC, and food stamps which gives so much tyrannical power to a middle-class professional elite. If Prof. Katz will reread his own books, perhaps he will rekindle the fire in his belly. But the trouble with American radicals has always been this tendency to the middle-aged fatty degeneration known as liberalism. (TF)

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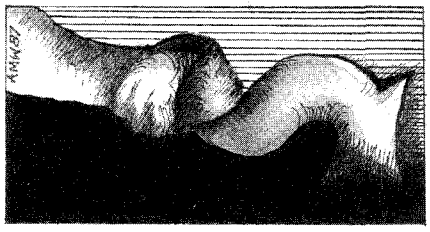
to answer to his neighbors?

There is little justification for at-large elections. They are antidemocratic, bigoted, and stupid. I say stupid because in a town like Springfield, where blacks comprise the lowest socioeconomic class, a minority that is excluded from the political process naturally develops resentments—an explosive situation, especially in a period of underemployment. Since the problem is so obvious and the remedy so simple, why do so many cities persist in maintaining such an antiquated system?

There are several reasons. Old habits die hard, especially in small towns, and no entrenched elite enjoys sharing power with its subjects. But there is, perhaps, another reason. At-large elections were sold as a progressive, enlightened, and liberal measure, because they held out the promise of utopia: cities free of pettiness and bickering, urban governments liberated from ethnic animosities, and the selfish "what's in it for me?" that characterizes ward politics in the Chicago style. During the same period of "good government," school districts were consolidated in a similar effort to keep parents and politicians from interfering. Ironically, all this was done in the name of democracy. Teachers and administrators needed a free hand if they were going to instill democratic values, and city government had to wrestle power out of the hands of neighborhood politicians and put it in the hands of decent people and trained professionals. The progress of democracy depended on it.

We used to call this sort of idea by its proper name: enlightened despotism. Since people are too stupid or too selfish to govern themselves, they need wise and benevolent leaders to govern in their name. We need government of the people and for the people, but never government by the people. Black voters are only the most recent victims of a progressive political establishment that has repeatedly attempted to save democracy from itself. At the national level, it has taken about 100 years for the republic of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson to turn into a debt-ridden bureaucracy. In local government, the old uproarious style of ethnic ward heelers and neighborhood government was slowly but surely transformed into miniature replicas of the Pentagon: powerful, centralized, wasteful, and unresponsive. When Americans contemplate the careers of old-style political bosses like Chicago's Richard Daly, I hope they will remember him, for all his faults, as one of the last democrats in America.

The New Yorker is undergoing a painful and much-publicized transition. In January the new owners decided it was time for William Shawn to retire and Robert Gottlieb to take over. Magazine staffers responded by signing a declaration that more or less demanded that Shawn's successor be promoted up from the ranks. At first sight, the response was surprising, since Gottlieb



does not represent much of a change: as president and editor in chief of Alfred Knopf Publishers, Gottlieb has been part of the New York literary scene for years—a New Yorker to the core.

On a deeper level, the panic is easy to understand. For years *The New Yorker* has been provided a hothouse haven for a small group of writers who soothe each other's vanities and lullaby their readers to sleep with reassuring platitudes. Any outsider, no matter how sympathetic, is bound to let in some fresh air. While Gottlieb will step on no spiders, he may sweep away a few cobwebs.

The New Yorker, we are told by those who write for it, is an institution. That much is certain, but what kind of institution? In my view, it most nearly resembles a geriatric hospital. It represents conservatism at its worst—a changeless and elegant package for withered and desiccated ideologies, a handsome political bible pressing the faded roses of the gracious intellectual left.

Of course, it was not always so. Under its founding editor, Harold Ross, the magazine was the New York (not American!) *Punch*, full of the bitter-sweet confections of James Thurber, Alexander Wolcott, E.B. White. In its pages, expatriate Midwesterners created the grand illusion of New York as a bastion of wit and talent. Much of it was a sham, and the ghosts that haunt the Algonquin round table are a set of nasty and embittered alcoholics. And yet, how much of life is illusion? Literary children growing up after World War II will always think kindly of *The New Yorker*: its funny (if unintelligible to an eight-year-old boy) cartoons; the bright splashy covers, as delightful as a spring rain on Park Avenue after a few drinks; the mysterious aloofness of the "Talk of the Town"; the dreams it nourished of a literary life.

By the mid-60's, all that was changed. There were "serious" discussions of the Vietnam War, civil rights, and wheat crops in a dull style that made you long for the *Guardian* or the *Evergreen Review*. People still buy *The New Yorker*, but it is for the cartoons, the short reviews of films, plays, and restaurants, and—above all—for the ads: I don't know anybody who actually *reads* it. Who is responsible for turning the sprightliest American magazine into the house organ of grim conformism? One can only point out that retiring editor William Shawn, the most admired man in the business, presided over the decline into senility. It is not at all clear what Mr. Gottlieb will be able to do, but the situation calls for heroic exertions. It is as if a small boy had to spring a beloved grandfather from the state asylum. Good luck.

The line between illusion and reality —always faint in Washington —continues to blur as Hollywood personalities testify on Capitol Hill. Last year it was Sissy, Jane, and Jessica posing as farm wives. More recently, Valerie ("Rhoda") Harper told the Senate Housing and Urban Affairs Subcommittee that something had to be done about homelessness, a situation she described as "heart-breaking." Rumor has it that Edward ("The Equalizer") Woodward will soon be asked to tell what he knows about CIA involvement in Iranian arms shipments, and if the "Golden Girls" haven't yet given their views on aging, it is only a matter of time.

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ADULT EDUCATION AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH
by Sherman M. Stanage
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This is the only book length study of phenomenology at work on the practices and theories of adult education and on the essential structures of adult learning. Many examples of phenomenological investigations and examples of concrete problems and projects for advanced and professional work in the theory and the practice of adult learning and adult education are presented.

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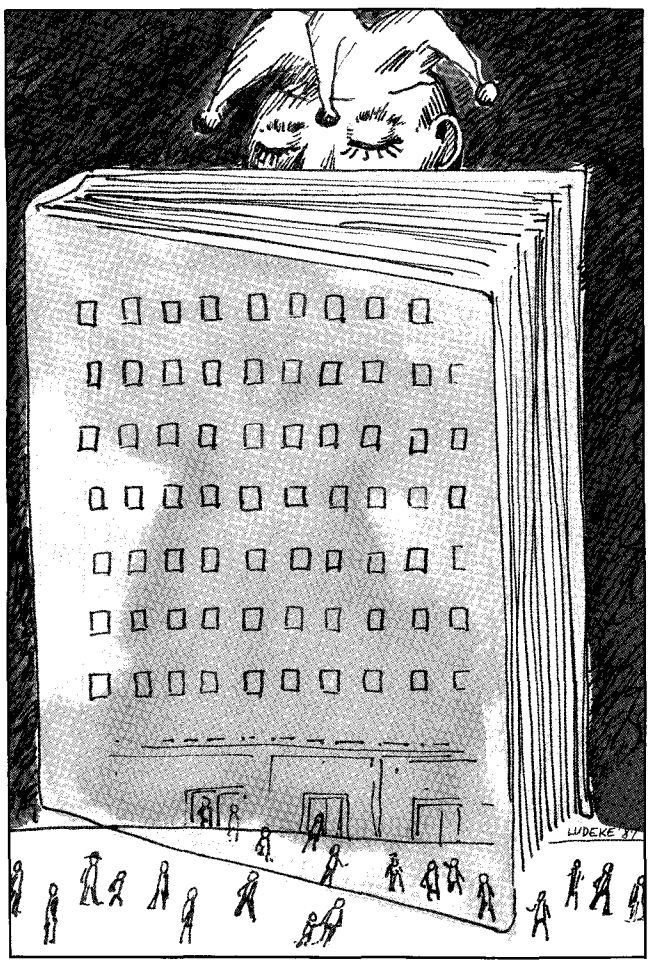
LITERACY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

by Thomas Fleming

Publishers Weekly must be the most depressing magazine published in the United States. Oh, there are others like *Esquire* that make us despair for the affluent numskulls who swap life-styles as if they were wives, or *The New Yorker* that makes us remember how really boring New York can be. But for the sick feeling in the stomach that threatens paralysis, the feeling Augustine must have had as he began the *Civitas Dei*, you must try the premier magazine of the book publishing industry. From the full-page ads promoting "A New Self-Help Profit Maker" by best-selling author L. Ron Hubbard, to news stories on Anna Porter's acquisition of 51 percent of Doubleday Canada or the copublishing plan of Basic Books and *The New Republic*, to interviews with industry leaders ("retailers and publishers are moving more toward making nonbook products available for consumers"), all the way to the back where we find names like Stephen King, Pat Conroy, Jackie Collins, Danielle Steel, Bill Cosby, Andy Rooney, Jim McMahon, Carol Burnett, and Robert Schuller. What do they all have in common—apart from fame, fortune, and bad prose? They all have top-15 hardcover best-sellers in the first week of 1987.



Please do not misunderstand. *Publishers Weekly* is a solid trade magazine. It can hardly be held responsible for what goes on in the literary marketplace, but many a writer and reader glancing through its pages must have asked themselves, "What is the point to universal literacy, if the novel of the week is *It* and the nonfiction best-seller is 'Dr.' Bill Cosby's ruminations on fatherhood?" (By the way, ask Dr. Bill, next time you run into him, how he earned his degree.)

If we turn from humble best-sellers to "PW's Choice: The Year's Best Books," there is some improvement but not much. Reynolds Price, Peter Taylor, and Mary Lee Settle are all mentioned, but so is Margaret Atwood. The nonfiction category, oddly enough, displays a high degree of professional courtesy, with books on Ed Murrow, Emily Dickinson, and Hollywood screenwriters, to say nothing of George Plimpton's anthology of *Paris Review* interviews, *Writers at Work*. It's a tough choice between the lowbrow Andy Rooney and the middlebrow Ed Murrow, but on balance, the best-seller is less offensive.

There is, to be sure, a place for popular fiction and popular history. Chesterton was not the only writer who has enjoyed "penny dreadfuls," but ours cost something like $22.95; and dreadful doesn't begin to describe the moral, intellectual, and artistic qualities of Ms. Steel or Rev. Schuller. America is the land of opportunity where citizens are free to choose, but increasingly readers of new books are free to choose between the sentimental garbage of soft-core sex gothics and the more pretentious garbage of Frederick Barthelme (not to be confused with Freddy Bartholomew) and Philip Roth. Why?

Those who delight in conspiracy theories will point to the interlocking directorates of American mass media. How easily executives and journalists shuttle back and forth between highbrow magazines (*The Atlantic*), middlebrow papers (the *New York Times*), and browless advertising

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circulars (*Newsweek*). The career of Gordon Lish is instructive: Lish, a self-described novelist, has worked for *Esquire*, Knopf, and Yale. For promoting the careers of some of the silliest and least-read writers in America, Lish has received awards both from the American Society of Magazine Editors and from the Columbia School of Journalism. Multiply Lish by a few hundred, and you have the American publishing industry, a cozy little cabal of self-promoters who dictate the reading tastes of 200-plus million people.

I wish it were that simple—so does Gordon Lish, one imagines—but the only conspiracy in all this is the conspiracy of mediocrity, of hustlers who regard the appetite for books as a kind of predisposition to drug addiction: The secret is how to find the best varieties of dope that will maximize consumption without killing the addict. Of course, they do push their own tastes. George Gilder and Kingsley Amis have both learned recently that feminists have an effective veto over New York publishing houses, and William Donahue's splendid book on the ACLU saw the light of day only because Aaron Wildavsky brought it to the attention of Transaction. Still, they couldn't prevent William Buckley from becoming a best-seller, and they were probably too stupid to realize the significance of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, a book that has planted the seeds of reactionary Christianity into the minds of millions of adolescents who read it—time after time—in the 1960's.

It is really very easy to understand the book business. All you have to know is a few facts: First, that anything printed between covers can be called a book and that the person whose name appears on the cover is the author. In this sense, Jane Fonda, Jim McMahon, Bill Cosby, and Andy Rooney are "authors" of "books." Second, that mass literacy is really mass subliteracy: The American system of public education guarantees the right of every child to read on the fifth-grade level. A few go beyond that but not far enough to influence the publishing business whose only object is to put as many fifth-grade books in the hands of as many fifth-grade readers as possible. This leaves the business of "literature" (as opposed to mere "books") safely in the hands of the mutual adoration society of critics and writers who read on the eleventh-grade level.

Perhaps the problem lies in mass literacy itself. There used to be a vigorous illiterate culture in Europe and America—ballads, tales, and memorized Bible verses—that was far superior to the print culture of the 20th century. "Edward" can still scare the pants off anyone who hears it for the first time, and who has not wept over hardhearted Barbara Allen or admired the heroism of Sir Patrick Spense and Johnny Armstrong? Those days are, of course, long gone, and one of the joys of literacy is being able to read the folk culture of other times.

Still, in this electronic age, an illiterate culture of movies, TV, and pop music occupies more of our time than book publishers like to consider. John Updike is the most important novelist in America—or so we've been told—but his name rings a bell with scarcely a tenth of the population. The creative geniuses who really influence the country are people like Clint Eastwood, Merle Haggard, and Phil Collins. The genuinely mass markets of pop culture must be harder to manipulate than the book trade. How else do we explain the success of *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish*?

The change in American literacy is most apparent in serious magazines. Back before World War I there was a class of readers (not simply scholars and intellectuals) who could be relied upon to subscribe to publications like *Scribner's*, *Century*, and *The Nation*. Fiction and literary essays predominated, but there were articles on history, art, and even philosophy. The most interesting was *The Nation*. Founded by E.L. Godkin in 1865, *The Nation* was edited by Paul Elmer More in the prewar years. A scholar and philosopher, More expected his readers to follow a philosophical argument and catch a classical allusion. Without excluding political questions, he refused to pander to the taste for muckraking and issues-oriented journalism that was already seeping into other magazines. Because it was read by teachers and journalists, *The Nation* exercised an influence far beyond its 6,000 subscribers. To compare More's magazine with what is turned out by Victor Navasky and Alexander Cockburn, the current reigning intelligences at *The Nation*, is an effort that numbs the imagination.

What most readers not working for the KGB find offensive in the present version of *The Nation* is the Stalinoid hard-line of Mr. Cockburn, but is *The Nation* really more ideological than its competitors? Hardly. Nearly every important magazine has a line to push, with friends in or out of power to defend. This in itself would not constitute a serious problem if the magazines did not devote most of their pages to titillating articles about Sandinistas (or *contras*) and the do's and don't's of SDI. One year it's religion, the next year it's the family, and before long it will be "cultural conservatism" or the return of compassion. The manufactured issues change; sometimes a manufacturer switches sides, but a Rip Van Winkle who slept through the past 10 years would wake up to find he had missed very little in the way of news. (I once gave up television, newspapers, and magazines for several years. While I missed most of the Watergate coverage, I managed to read a lot of anthropology. Believe me, Mr. Nixon would have received fairer treatment in a pygmy band!)

To be fair, one has to concede that political journalism does supply a real need in American life by answering the question: How can an aspiring writer get a piece of the action? It has sometimes seemed that the only arts in which Americans really excel involve snookering each other. The Yankee peddler was our first symbol, the medicine show our first native art form, and advertising our greatest contribution to the world's culture. Until the 20th century, it was hard for the literati (and the far more numerous subliterati) to find their place at the trough. In his essay "On Being an American" (written in the Harding Administration!), Mencken commented on "the doctrine that it is *infra dignitatem* for an educated man to take a hand in the snaring of this goose." On the contrary, he insisted, any man with "the intelligence of a stockbroker and the resolution of a hat-check girl . . . can cadge enough money, in this glorious commonwealth of morons, to make life soft for him." Mencken shared more of the American vices than he liked to admit, but in this case he proved himself to be a prophet. A few years later he was ridiculing the newfound

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professionalism of the "Babbitts turned Greeley" with their journalism schools, codes of ethics, and press clubs. It was only a matter of a few years before the old-fashioned reporter turned into a new-style journalist like Tom Wicker, whose novels read like columns and whose columns are as true to life as the latest Danielle Steel.

In the case of Mencken himself, political commentary provided a lucrative career for a literary essayist. In this respect, he was the heir of Swift and Defoe. But Mencken's successors in "the profession" are more like the heirs of P.T. Barnum whose declaration, "There's a sucker born every minute," has made every political journalist an eternal optimist.

It is not that there is *no* place for political journalism, but its proliferation—at the expense of all humane learning—reflects the increasing vulgarization of life in the 20th century. Outside academic journals and the little reviews, it is hardly possible to read about any serious question unless it comes to us in the motley dress of a politician. Science is reduced to genetic engineering and textbook controversies; religion and theology are whittled down to the "wall of separation" and the Pat Robertson candidacy.

History, perhaps, fares the worst. It is hard to think of a widely reviewed book of history that was not aimed at some current political issue. In the case of poetry, it is probably better not to discuss that subject in polite company, but how are we to explain the respectable status of Mr. Ginsberg, surely the most prominent political poet since Pope? If Ginsberg has ever written a line that is neither mawkish nor obscure, I challenge anyone to point it out. And yet this "grotesque essence" has to be discussed, has to be taken seriously because he chants (through his nose) "of arms and the man" (preferably the latter, it seems). A man of letters who wants to make his way in the world surely cannot afford to ignore the Ginsbergs, Mailers, Roths, Sagans, and Wickers of this world, no matter how much he recoils in instinct from their drivel; and while he might wish to take the high ground with Paul Elmer More, he may soon find himself on the level of Walter Lippmann, writing windy discourses on the American destiny. The position of a serious-minded journalist becomes as paradoxical as a police informant in a drug ring: The more he wants to correct the abuses in "the profession," the more he is compelled to participate in the degradation. Before too long he's hooked both on the money and the drug (cocaine or celebrity). More than one aspiring young conservative pundit has ended up part of the problem. Old men shake their heads and mutter, "A boy's will is the wind's will" and let it go at that.

Most of what we call politics is simply stupid, of little interest to grown men and women. The competition of one set of greedy rascals against another only rarely results in an important national election (1980 is an obvious exception). The trouble with *The Nation* in its present form is not so much its politics—who really takes Cockburn seriously?—but the triviality of its political obsessions. In some respects, *The Nation* is actually better than its more softhearted competition. There are occasional good pieces by film critic Andrew Kopkind and literary essayist Arthur C. Danto. (Once in a blue moon Calvin Trillin is half as funny as he thinks he is.) Christopher Hitchens is often good, but he is better in the *Times Literary Supplement* (London), where there is less of a party line. The attempt made by "responsible liberals" to read *The Nation* out of the world of polite discourse is as much a work of intellectual thuggery as any of Mr. Cockburn's columns. In fact, the decline from More to Navasky is not that much more precipitous than the skid of other established magazines—although *The Nation* had farther to go. *The New Repubic* began publishing in 1914, just as Paul Elmer More was leaving *The Nation*. The conjunction is significant, since *TNR* quickly took the lead in the issues-and-advocacy journalism that developed a mass market among the half-educated products of government schooling. Better than anything, the news and opinion magazines symbolize the triumph of general education.

The fruits of mass literacy can be observed everywhere, but it is only when we converse with teachers that we realize what harm has been done. An average high-school teacher is a college graduate possessed of at least ordinary intelligence. Since it is the teachers' business to impart ideas and information, we expect them to be at least resident aliens in the realm of letters. But on the rare occasions when they talk about books, what do they mention? The women seem addicted to drugstore romances and the men typically fall for productions like *Iacocca*, *Megatrends*, or the latest Robert Ludlum. There are (or used to be) distinguished exceptions in nearly every school. However, as a class, teachers have learned nothing worth knowing, by and large, and (what is worse) they will never learn anything, because they are locked into a mass marketing scheme in which issues and ideas are so many brand-name products to be advertised on Ted Koppel's *Nightline* or the *Today Show*.

The most obvious remedy is to give up on mass literacy or to write anything of value in Latin. Now, more than ever, we can agree with Edmund Waller:

> Poets who lasting marble seek
> Must carve in Latin or in Greek.

There is at least as large an audience for serious poetry in Latin as for English. Failing a second Renaissance of the classics, we might come up with new labels for what the book trade puts out. After all, the American Dairy Association has protected the consumer's interest by restricting the word cheese to cheese. Everything else is a processed cheese product or a nondairy cheese food. Why not use "processed book-like product" for the novels of Philip Roth and nonliterary book matter for Dr. Bill Cosby's *Fatherhood*. Perhaps the National Endowment for the Humanities could be given authority for administering a Federal truth-in-labeling law for the literary marketplace:

> Warning: the enclosed literature-surrogate-material by Carl Sagan could be injurious to the IQ and prose style of public school graduates. Use only with caution under the direction of a competent scientist or theologian.

Something like that. The NEH would be performing (perhaps for the first time in its history) a really useful service. We might even let them hang around after the revolution.

—*Thomas Fleming*

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HAVING OPINIONS *by Stephen R.L. Clark*

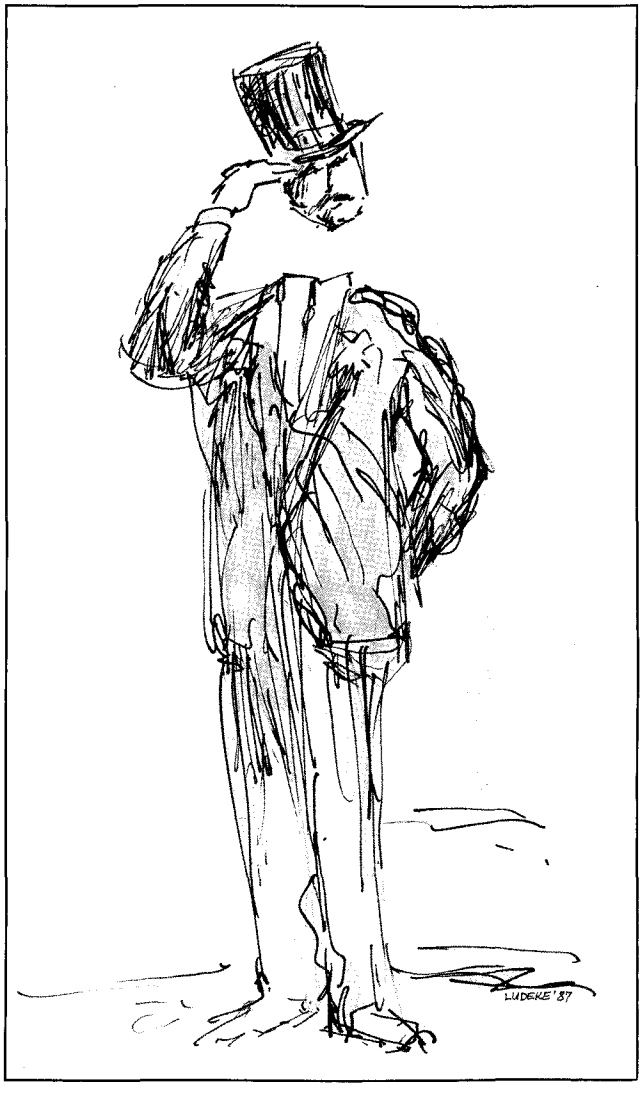
"The public buys its opinions as it buys its meat, or takes in its milk, on the principle that it is cheaper to do this than to keep a cow."

—Samuel Butler

When opinion polls are conducted on some urgent matter of the day (the character of Colonel Qaddafi, or the compatibility of some soon-to-be-married royal couple) those polled are permitted to declare themselves "Don't Knows." It is usually a minority who are so ill-disposed as to forget their civic duty to have an opinion on each and every subject, and they can usually expect to be rebuked as fence-sitters or slugabeds. People confronted by the demand that they take sides can generally produce a "view," which they maintain against all comers without the slightest attempt to seek out confirmatory or counterevidence. Sometimes, no doubt, this view "bubbles up" from the speaker's entrenched evaluations and opinions; sometimes, it has simply been selected, off the cuff, from the available alternatives and entered in the speaker's "axiom-set"—the things he'll say when asked, or which he may even "act on" in some more material way—without any implication that the alternative opinion would not once have done as well.

People choose sides in civil, fashionable, moral, or metaphysical questions very much as children choose which local football team they will (notionally) support. "I'm the sort of person who supports Everton rather than Liverpool, pretends to adore the Queen Mother and dislike Princess Anne, thinks that Qaddafi is insane and Gorbachev is a nicer chap than Brezhnev, and votes for Mrs. Tiggywinkle while expressing cautious disapproval of her policies." Or in other circles: "I'm the sort that was born under Aquarius, thinks the military-industrial complex controls the Western world, and that 'the scientists' are only not revealing their solution to death, UFO's, and telepathy because they're in league with the Freemasons." Taking a position, like wearing a particular dress or choosing to drink lager, is expressing loyalty to a group, an image of oneself, a particular rhetoric.

Those of us who honestly don't know (and often don't much care) which team or party or celebrity to claim to "like" suffer from more than pollsters. Hesse's description of the Age of the Feuilleton, in *The Glass Bead Game*, comes to mind: "Noted chemists or piano virtuosos would be queried about politics, for example, or popular actors, dancers, gymnasts, aviators or even poets would be drawn out on the benefit and drawbacks of being a bachelor, or on the presumptive causes of financial crises." Those who possess some genuine expertise in one profession or craft may even believe that they have superior insights to convey



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about some other craft. In many cases, "stating a position" is only to represent oneself as a certain kind of person, claiming the affection of others of that kind, expressing a particular loyalty. The world of letters is awash with ignorant assertion and self-dramatization.

Public-spirited persons must have a view, must join the game, because democracy itself requires us to make judgments on the rights and wrongs of public issues: the processing of nuclear waste, the likely general effects of increasing personal taxation, the right of Argentinians to claim to "own" certain offshore islands. In most such cases, we do not know (and may suspect that neither does anyone else) what may befall or what was done a century and more ago or which paper to believe. Even if some particular promoter of opinions seems to us to have a good argument going, we are uncomfortably aware that in civil matters any argument is defeasible.

In logic or mathematics, what follows from true premises is true, no matter what else is true; in civil questions (and indeed in practical engineering), what "follows" from true premises may still be false. It may be true that the increase of learning is a good thing, and that to experiment on orphan children to their destruction will increase learning: To that extent the experiments are demonstrably good, but other premises as indubitably decree that they are bad.

What sounds like a good idea may not be, because other factors that the promoter has not mentioned must be taken into account. And how shall we ever know that no other factors are important? So democratic procedure requires that we take sides on wholly inadequate information, that we trust our lives and futures to bridges built by committee, and by committees who are never sure that they have all the information that they would need for rational choice. Or rather: They should not rationally be sure of this unless they are rationally convinced that they here confront an absolute.

If (as is highly likely) it is absolutely wrong to experiment upon orphan children, no matter what advantages might be gained thereby, there is no need for the local ethical committee to wait for further information on those advantages: The experiment can be ruled out at once. The implication is twofold: First, a relatively uninformed electorate may rationally forbid or require those things that are absolutely wrong or absolutely right, without the inevitable qualms that should afflict those who know that they are deciding issues without full, value-free knowledge of the consequences of what they do. The only things of which we could be rationally certain in advance of training and learning and experiment wholly beyond most or all of us are absolutes. Whatever is not absolutely wrong or right is wrong or right only under conditions, and we only rarely (if ever) know that those conditions alone obtain. Second (and more pragmatically), we can only believe that our decisions are more than arbitrary opinion if we believe that they embody absolutes. If we cannot believe, on any particular occasion, that they do, we cannot rationally believe that the decision is more than a choice which might as easily have gone the other way. "A person who arbitrarily chooses the propositions that he will adopt can use the word 'truth' only to emphasize the expression of his determination to hold on to his choice" (C.S. Pierce, *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*, 1877). If I vote for Mrs. Tittlemouse not because I think her right in principle but because I guess or choose to be the sort of chap that guesses that she may have better effects all round than Mr. Tiptoes, my vote is a gesture, and anything I say on its behalf is opiniatrety.

Those who fixedly support a party, sect, or tribe must suppose that theirs is an absolute devotion; those who do not must rationally regard their occasional votes as guesses or as gestures. The latter will be inclining to leave all necessary particular decisions to those supposed to be more rationally informed; the former will require that no decisions be taken against their ruling absolute. Those who have no absolute to back would be rash to complain whatever decision is taken: Whether the government decides to abandon nuclear weaponry or to acquire new generation missiles, it will be on the basis of much better information than the average citizen has. The government is quite probably mistaken (and should bear in mind that this is so), but the probability of John Doe's being in error is far higher; therefore those who have no absolutes to defend must rationally be more acquiescent. The government may not know best, but it will on average know better. The voter's office is only to express occasional opinions that no one need attend to, to have the opportunity to "stand up for one's opinions."

A governing party, accordingly, whether it is literally political or merely a governing sect or sept of church, profession, or family, has three ways of securing its position without resort to arms. The first is to persuade an established majority that its principles are absolutely right, that all good men and true can know beforehand what is to be done or not done. Alternatively, if there is little hope of persuading an established majority that what they do is absolutely right, they have good reason to encourage a less absolutist view. It is better to encourage citizens to think of votes as gestures or gambles. Best of all, from the governors' point of view, would be a situation where a mass of people had no settled principle of judgment, but were fashionably convinced of this opinion or that and held to it not because they had or hoped to have any real evidence of truth, but because they had built their personality around the fact of being the sort of person that thinks things like that.

Genuine absolutists, after all, think that certain things are right or wrong, irrespective of the consequences or the opinions of the ruling classes. Genuine relativists, believing that right or wrong depend upon a mass of detail that they simply do not have, can have no fixed or fanatical devotion even to the cause they gamble on. What is required by any party leader is a mass of people who will express fanatical devotion to the cause while at the same time allowing the leaders every practical decision and leaving no scope for rational inquiry about the cause itself. To query the cause is to criticize a man's religion, and so to mock the sort of man he has chosen to become while ingenuously pretending not to realize that the cause is not adopted as a rational one, incumbent on anyone who knew enough, and laboriously checked by honest inquirers. The best conclusion for the leader is that we should be encouraged to have opinions which we half realize are ones we have no epistemic right to have. Those with the opposite "opinion" are less dangerous than those who reserve their judgment or claim not to know.

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In the Age of the Feuilleton, in brief, the social demand that we have unjustified opinions, expressive of our personality and class-loyalty, is a mechanism of social control. Really to think that what we choose to say is true admits the possibility that we and our leaders might be wrong. To inquire into the rational grounding of the opinions currently on offer reminds us that most of us have no epistemic right to any opinion on most subjects of importance (including, of course, the question of who does have such a right on any particular subject: Who has a right to an opinion on the ancient Assyrian copula, the reliability over the next thousand years of current techniques of radioactive waste disposal, or whether property—as it is currently distributed—is theft?).

Relativists can hardly be absolute in their own defense and must rationally allow those with the strongest claim to know to have their way. Absolutists may hold even their own leader to judgment. What leaders want in their parties is a dogmatic relativism, a sense of superior wisdom that by abandoning (verbally) all claim to truth is spared the rigors of self-examination. That is what opiniatrety amounts to: perseverance in opinions that even the opinionated do not seriously think are rational or true. The having of such opinions is what pollsters, feuilletonists, and party hacks require of us. Freedom correspondingly requires us to confess, Socratically, our ignorance, and to suspect the opinionated of a like defect.

The Enlightenment sages who required that we reserve our opinion till we have checked the reasoning and evidence that might support one view or another had far too individualist a notion of what counted as sound rational practice. Life is too short for each of us to check every separate dictum before endorsing it, and too demanding of particular action for us always to refrain from judgment. What I offer as my opinion is not opiniatrety merely because I cannot adequately outline what would lead rational inquirers to that conclusion.

We are entitled to our prejudices and accepted truths, and those who claim to have no prejudice have usually failed to inspect their axiom-set with proper clarity. Opiniatrety is not to purvey accepted wisdom without quite knowing how to prove it. It is to adopt as one's own whatever the breath of fashion and class-loyalty may blow. The Enlightenment solution has exacerbated the problem: Since no one can, in fact, completely check accepted wisdom, but no one can ever do without a prejudice or two, the opinionated classes are condemned to rely upon opinions that they know they should not have, to change opinions as they change dresses, by following fashion and their friends' expressions.

Then, how do we maintain a properly and practically Socratic stance? Only by wearing another badge, by acting in loyalty to an ideal community whose goal is truth. In the Age of the Feuilleton we can revere the true society of scholars, no one of whom could by himself check every prejudice but who can hope to cooperate over the centuries in distilling truth. "The opinion that is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is real."

Pierce's faith in that destiny, or his representation of that faith in ultimate agreement as a necessary postulate of scientific reason, is rationally accepted only by those who think the world is founded on that real, not just ideal, community. As Lossky wrote in *The World as an Organic Whole* in 1928, "According to [concrete ideal-realism] the ultimate ground of the world is God, who transcends the world and is more than perfect—a Being that stands above perfection. The proximate ground of the world, and a component part of it, is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of the Spirit as a realized ideal. Even the beings that are farthest removed from it may hope to attain it, for that kingdom really exists, and by the grace of God, its rays lighten, if only to a small extent, each one of us, helping us to endure the sorrows and burdens of the imperfect life which is our self-chosen doom." Opiniatrety and arbitrary government are resisted best by those who acknowledge that all of us live under judgment, that there are absolutes, and a truth already known to Heaven.

YEARS AFTERWARD

by Fred Chappell

An epilogue to *The Wind in the Willows*

They're decades older now, and Time
Has brought its autumn change to Toad,
To Rat, to Mole. No more for them
The rigors of the Open Road,

Encounters colorful and strange
With every kind of Wayfarer.
They know they shall no longer range
So wide. Before his cozy fire

Mole sits his armchair, his feet up,
And listens to November wind
Puff his chimney like a pipe.
He reads his paper to the end.

Perhaps this evening Rat will come
For an unaggressive game of chess
And a crumb of gossip. And a crumb
Of Wensleydale and watercress.

Perhaps no one will come, and Mole
Shall spend the hours in reverie
While the wind dampens its raw brawl;
Then rise to brew a cup of tea;

Then sink into his chair again.
Those days of high emprise appear
With the May-wine freshness of spring rain
And paint their pictures in the fire.

So long ago . . . Now they all slip,
Abstracted, comfortable, and grubby,
Into old age. Though Toad has taken up
Hang gliding—as a sort of hobby.

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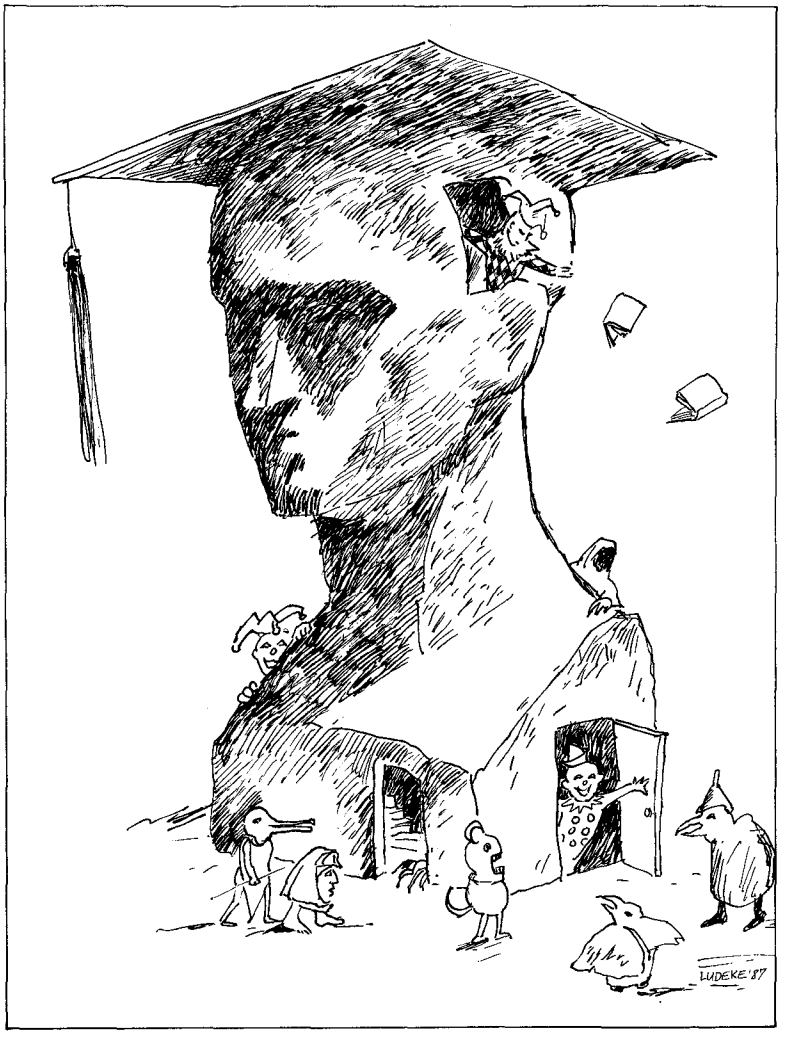
ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS CURRICULUM *by Thomas Molnar*

The sociological thesis that education is "for society" is acceptable today because in this statement, "society" is a sufficiently vague term to prescribe fewer and fewer binding guidelines as we ascend from lower to higher education. The thesis becomes unacceptable when an ideological restriction is added: The school must be a small replica of society. Formulated as policy, the statement comes to then mean, particularly in a mobile society like ours, that education may never approach ultimate questions but must pursue immediate and practical ends: It becomes, then, a string of haphazard ad-hoc responses to real and concocted "social problems." This is illustrated by the scrapbook method of learning, the picking up of patchy, superficial bits of information from usually unreliable sources. It is further encouraged by television programming where the patchy approach reaches its apotheosis. The overall result is a ravaging of the intellect and sensibility, a submission to the pedestrian. The real objective of education is lost from sight.



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What do I mean by "real objective"? The question must *not* be answered in our pluralistic society which—a historic first—prides itself on its agnostic inability to offer valid responses except on the level of a temporary "consensus." In such a perspective, realities, values, and judgments are less important than the preservation of plurality itself, an attitude which may lead to a modicum of social peace on the forum but to indifference and disaffection in the realm of truth and its exploration. The fact is, all previous societies, while harmonizing education and community objectives on the child's level, set aims much higher for later education than the utilitarian and the pragmatic, the so-called socially useful. Indeed, in mankind's pre-American millennia, the goal of a higher education (by other names designated, of course) was the probing of existence and the mysteries of transcendence.

The Greek *paideia* was based on the reading of Homer, but it set more elevated objectives in the philosophical schools of which Plato's academy and Aristotle's lyceum were only samples and which taught disciplines from grammar to science. The combined trivium and quadrivium of the Middle Ages led to philosophy, law, theology, medicine, and science. Then, until recently, grade and high school, while providing lateral outlets toward many kinds of occupations and functions (engineering, trade, business, etc.), were primarily regarded as places for a strong "core curriculum" leading to intellectual pursuits at universities.

Thus education has always been ordered as a hierarchy of subjects—a pedagogical/academic application of the hierarchy principle without which no society and no institution could function: government, law courts, art and music conservatories, business enterprises, workshops, scientific laboratories. In spite of the coming mass-education, in my university years in Europe first-year students were taught in large lecture halls, and the classroom became smaller as students cleared the strict selective process to the fourth year. A higher education not aiming at the formation of an elite is either an ideological indoctrination or a hardly veiled commercial enterprise.

Education that used to be ordered from the top down has now been reordered from the bottom up. The university has had to adjust to the grade and high school, the professor to the psychopedagogue, the curriculum which searched existence and transcendence to social studies and how-to sessions. The ideology of the lower grades which culminates in Dewey's formula—"The school must turn into a sociological workshop"—has imposed its world view and methods on the university.

In a democracy as total as ours, this is a natural and irresistible process, and it would be unjust to attribute the

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pressure from below to the "revolutionary" trends of the 70's. When I first came into contact with American education, in the very early 50's, I was struck by the myriad demands addressed to schools and colleges by pressure groups like businesses, banks, civic clubs, and advertisers, demands that servile school boards immediately translated as "courses" in the curriculum. Thus I was not at all surprised when, 20 years later, the pressure started coming from rebels with or without a cause, then from minorities, feminists, gays, and other radicals. Schools which had yielded to the local supermarket (they called it "consumer education") or to car dealers and police (they called it "driver's education"), easily took the leftward turn, adjusting their curriculum to new commands issued by Black Panthers or pedophiles. "Higher" education (by now in quotes) automatically followed the trend. It even provided the "leadership" (quotes again). I remember a panel discussion in the 60's, where a high-school principal boasted of "120 courses" offered at his school. I equally remember the chairman of the philosophy department at a northwestern university who proudly announced that his courses cover the *latest* in the field.

Today, as a report in the *Wall Street Journal* has it, universities congratulate themselves on the popularity of courses on the Vietnam War, drawing "capacity crowds." As yesterday's youth begin to vote, it is explained by several happy deans, "they want to know whether current foreign policy is a viable one." Other groups also congratulate themselves because now the textbook industry too gets in high gear (the *WSJ* explains); the market opens to just about anything on Vietnam; and everybody, including President Reagan and the veterans, is satisfied. (Let me remark that where education is taken seriously, 50 years must pass before history may focus on past events. Otherwise, courses can only consist of half-baked information and the confrontation of passions.)

The whole process has nothing to do with education, higher or otherwise. The slogan has turned into reality: Give them what they want to hear, or rather, to buy. But Vietnam on the academic agenda is not a fortuitous item. Compare it with what high schools offer, taken from another report: courses on alcohol and drug abuse, abortion, suicide, nuclear war, homosexuality and rape, pre- and extra-marital sex, witchcraft, illegal behavior, contraception, communism. This is worse than brainwashing: It is the systematic dismantling of mental and moral faculties. Yet, by no means is it a deviation from the earlier, but still ongoing, policy of teaching students how to open a bank account and how to behave on a date. The overall guideline for schools, colleges, and universities is to deal with social problems as they arise, following the sacralized principle that only the instantly experienced phenomenon has value, and even that on the most vulgar plane of responses to stimuli.

We recognize here not so much the effect of television but the fact that television too is a product of the public obsession with the frivolous, the "what works," the immediately sensational and salable. Public hypocrisy insists that television is guilty of programming violence and of gluing children to the screen for an average of 40 hours a week. The Athenians too sat through half-a-day in the theater, and not all plays were written by Sophocles. (Of course, this was only once or twice a year!) Nor is violence on TV per se to be condemned, since it merely caters to a puritanical society which, too timid and soul-denying to display genuine emotions, plunges in blood as a substitute. Television is a product of society exactly the same way the school is: a scrapbook for a disjointed culture.

The consequences for students are devastating. In my own observation, confirmed by all those I know and who are willing to speak frankly in private (let's not close our eyes to intimidation in our free society), they are uninterested, listless, and uncurious—not only about ancient and far-away things, but about current affairs and issues also, since their originally receptive minds have been thwarted, fooled, underfed. The tiny handful that has resisted countereducation feels isolated, marginalized, locked up in a psychiatric clinic for nonconforming to the average, the mediocre, the clichémonger. Hence, their knowledge too is sporadic, unsystematized by a general grasp which could only come from a well-ordered curriculum leading them through elementary, secondary, and university education. The content of their knowledge, acquired after Herculean travails, resembles the nucleus of a cult, without communication with adherents of other cults. This near-absence of links with other fields of knowledge and their adepts reduces the striving of the better-endowed student to intellectual loneliness and makes him deficient in articulation: There is around him no educated milieu where ideas could be probed, exchanged, tested, challenged. For a member of this clandestine minority to excel, the cost may be inner exile or moral collapse.

Without hesitation, I call this state of affairs and the fate reserved to its victims an immense disaster, an intellectual holocaust. The conspiracy against a real education may count on the participation of powerful vested interests: popular magazines and television, the culturally pretentious press, the textbook, the audio-visual and the electronic industries, the bureaucracies and the politicians, the government branches and the university officials—none of which would know how to prepare, and what to do with, an *educated man*. This is why all of them praise such lowest common denominators as television programs which are ideologically safe and through which the collective Big Brother can watch himself in action. Thus everything converges to produce the *average man*, our society's ideal, with the correct doses of work-and-leisure, mixed according to the mediocrity-formula. Once again, this is achieved not with strong-arm methods but by not discriminating between one course and another on a hierarchically ordered tablet, by catering to every whim, by persuading the student-customer that a mechanical existence is better than an examined life.

I needed this mini-essay to reach the topic I had been asked to write about: What should a university teach? I very much wonder if the question has a meaning in our present situation. We no longer have universities, places having faith in a higher Being to whom links—through contemplation, creation, and knowledge—are sought by the teaching and learning participants. We have only, whether state-owned or private, monstrous production lines which aim, underneath the Tartuffian discourse, at the quickest

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method for the graduating student to make money: in law, business, or some governmental bureaucracy. The courses are shaped so as to satisfy job requirements—or the professor's fancy-flights into some Utopia. The electives (themselves an anti-intellectual invention) allow for the picking up of a few luxury items, just adequate to drop an unexpected statement at cocktail hour but not to sustain a genuine interest.

Facing the production-line approach, this academic cash-and-carry, there are the Great Books courses, another way of fooling the customer. I know, I taught in such curricula for the chosen few. What happens is that the unprepared, backgroundless high-school graduate meets the pipe-chewing, tweedy professor who plunges him in *texts*, the way the mystagogue or the shaman confronts the candidate to initiation. The latter is made at least to pass the threshold; the student remains bewildered.

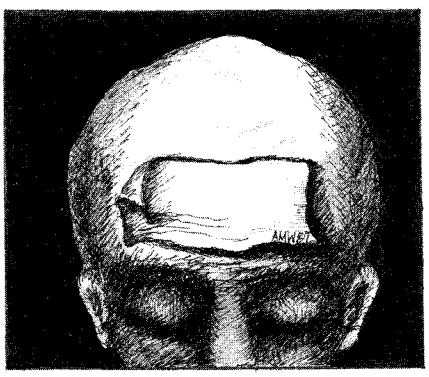
I feel increasingly inclined to subscribe to the statement of a stranger (it turned out he was a college professor) whom I once met at an airport and engaged in conversation. Why should American students, belonging to a new world and flexing new muscles, he asked, remain tied to curricula born from alien realities and formulating alien questions? What can Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, Giordano Bruno, Pascal, say to him? Indeed, I have often found a measure of disbelief on my students' politely listening faces when matters came up to which their experience and inner life provided no echo whatever. Conditioned to react to novelty, they might produce a flicker of interest in existentialism or Marxism, the names of Kafka or Brecht. Yet, not as a movement of ideas or as a writer with roots in the past, in vital controversies with long-dead opponents, in concepts that never die. Even my students at Yale, bright and undereducated, with here and there sudden islands of luminous interest, were hard put to grasp as tangible the time elapsed between Plato and Plotinus: What does influence mean if it must cross six centuries? Or at Princeton's Divinity School, where I found that students preparing for the ministry had no idea that French and German bishops might entertain, and collectively proclaim, views on nuclear war different from those of the American hierarchy.

With courses geared to "education for life," the American student is sentenced to live in a time-and-space vacuum; neither the past nor the distance is communicated to him as real coordinates of existence. The parts of the curriculum which try to do so remain faceless and voiceless, abstract entities to be piled up like old textbooks on dusty shelves. Native children in French colonial territories were made to recite, like French children in France, "Our ancestors, the Gauls . . . " I have the uncomfortable impression when teaching American students that "our civilization began in Athens and Rome . . . "—that they are as incredulous as the pupils in French Africa. Not long ago, one of my students, a young woman, forgot an earlier reference to Herder and said: "You know, that German guy!?" I felt like answering: I know, my dear; *you* don't have to. . . .

REVISIONS

A Baedeker

Harvard has always provided America with its most eminent right-thinking men, and the *Harvard Guide to Influential Books: 113 Eminent Harvard Professors Discuss the Books That Have Shaped Their Thinking* (edited by C. Maury Devine, Claudia M. Dissel, and Kim D. Parrish, New York: Harper & Row; $7.95) gives us a rare opportunity to judge the state of literary orthodoxy. Cheek by jowl with Dante and Shakespeare are the modern classics of fashionable opinion: Norman Mailer (chosen by J.K. Galbraith), John Hersey (Howard Hiatt), John Dewey and Ian McHarg (both selected by Anne Spirn). As an indicator of complacency, this unique attempt at creating an etiquette of the mind has its shortcomings. For, side by side with proper bibliographers are those, albeit few (Bernard Bailyn, William Bossart, Mary Chatfield, James Hodgson), who exhibit a welcome reverence for Johnson's dictum that "no man is a hypocrite in his pleasures." In their praise of uncommon reading matter, enjoyed and cited with courage, these eminent Harvard professors inadvertently fall afoul of their more prudent colleagues. E.O. Wilson has the effrontery to list Arthur Conan Doyle and T.D. Lysenko!



Were it merely artless, the idea of compiling such an index would call for sympathy. Unfortunately, what we are faced with is an exercise in correct thinking which reveals more by what it conceals than otherwise. Whether the eminent academicians polled by bureaucrats-on-sabbatical really believe that *The Fate of the Earth* by Jonathan Schell is of critical importance is immaterial. Their belief in intellectual orthodoxy, however, is.

There is little to be done, one may suppose, about convolutions to anticipate rewarding attitudes rather than verity. Yet, this disquieting distrust, by the majority of luminaries polled, of their own perceptions bodes little hope for their ability to teach their students probity. Scholasticism of desire may prove to be even more sterile than a Sunday school catechism, and our survival as a culture may be connected with our willingness to quote Zane Grey or Raymond Chandler. (MS)

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GATEKEEPING FUNCTIONS AND PUBLISHING TRUTHS

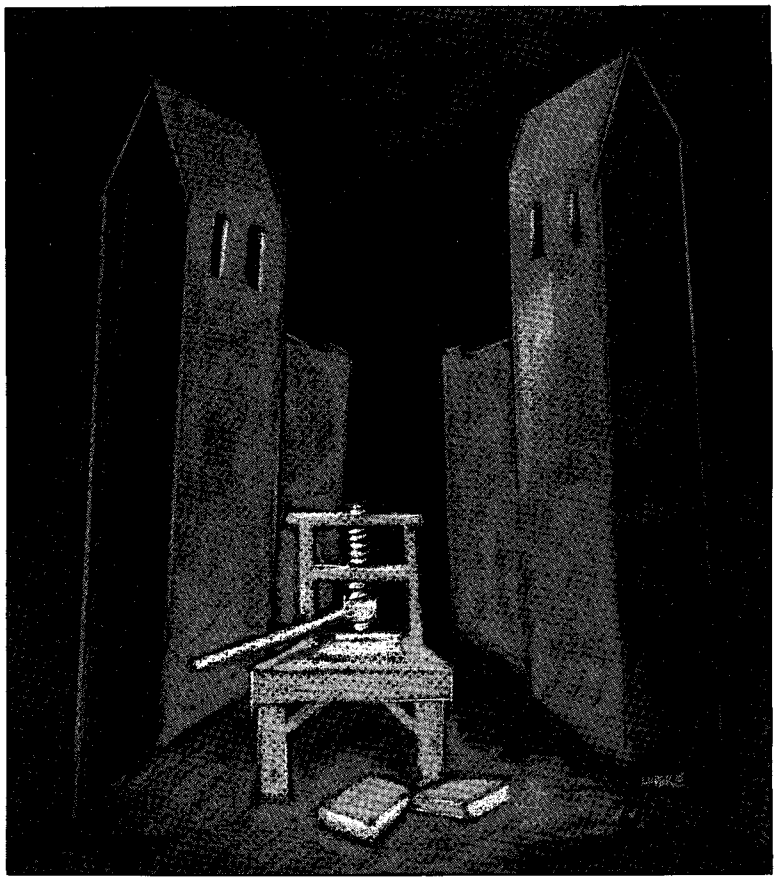
by Irving Louis Horowitz

When a forgery is uncovered or a plagiarized volume appears or a fake letter is adduced to support a mediocre manuscript, cries are sent forth that there is a need for tighter security by publishers. This is often coupled with a complaint that authors should scrutinize themselves more carefully. The burden of my remarks is quite the reverse: that the review process works surprisingly well and that authors have enough mechanisms of censorship at work to inhibit all but the most brazen few from "crossing the lines" of sound judgment and good taste alike. On rare occasions, serious transgressions may not be captured until after publication, but one of the chief functions of making a work public is exactly to separate sense from nonsense.

Maintaining standards of truth in scholarly communication is an important goal, but it is necessarily a shared obligation. In the main, the amount of intentional deception that goes undiscovered is small. For example, four relatively famous, popular books have received careful scholarly attention: Alex Haley's *Roots*, H.R. Haldeman's *The Ends of Power*, David Rorvik's *In His Image: The Cloning of a Man*, and Timothy J. Cooney's *Telling Right From Wrong*. Each has received different sorts of criticism regarding standards of truth. Apart from the introductory essay, *Roots* was not billed as nonfiction but as a piece of imaginative reconstruction which provided a collective vision of the slave roots of American blacks. It was criticized as inaccurate by those who took it as a literal tracing of a single family tree, but the transgression was quite properly seen as minor and modest. H.R. Haldeman's *The Ends of Power* may be a more revealing statement than many of the fiction and nonfiction potboilers that followed Watergate. In part, the book aroused curiosity since Haldeman, although former President Nixon's closest aide, had previously refused to "cash in" by discussing Watergate in public. One can accuse Haldeman of a stubborn inability, even now, to grasp the magnitude of the Watergate affair, but not even his most severe critics have labeled him a liar on the presentation of larger issues. Certainly his version is as credible as a host of others which came before and after.

The Rorvik volume is more problematic and more interesting, not so much because the author claimed to have evidence that a man has been cloned, but because the promotional copy asserts that the publisher is an adequate judge of the veracity of these scientific claims. Since Lippincott is a major publisher of medical texts, its trade division is clearly suggesting that they consulted in-house experts on the scholarly side. This may account for the disturbance felt by the scientific community, which was not, apparently, consulted at all. Even the Clifford Irving biography on the late Howard Hughes might have passed muster as imaginative biography—the problem here was fraud in labeling. The author sought a large advance, and the publisher sought big profits by claiming in its advance publicity that the book was autobiographical rather than biographical. But as the Rorvik case indicates, this seems to have been more an example of advertising exaggeration than publisher negligence.

The case of Cooney's *Telling Right From Wrong* provides another sort of wrinkle in the truth-telling paradox. The author believed, incorrectly as it turned out, that his book had no chance of being published by a major publisher without a supporting letter from a major academic figure. When the faked letter was discovered, the original publisher declined publication; but another enterprising press picked up the option and, in this case, the plates. Since the quality of the book is not under consideration, but only the authenticity of a supporting document, the issue came down to whether an author-as-faker is any worse than an author-as-murderer. According to Random House, the book would have been materially affected by the author's prepublication actions. According to the author and his



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new publisher, Prometheus, the book remained to be judged on its merits or demerits and not on admittedly shaky ethical behavior in search of publication. In this instance, the "truth" of the manuscript was not in question; rather the "morality" of publishing strategies by a young author was central.

In each case, these are books with a "serious" purpose or message, but published as "trade" rather than "scholarly" works. This is in itself an indication that the problem of truth in publishing, with rare exceptions, is most frequently found in big publishing houses that have comprehensive lists. Books published as fiction are *prima facie* exempt from "truth-telling" (except when such titles get too close to empirical reality), and books published as pure scholarship are subject to a severe or vigorous review process that screens out works of serious deficiency.

Scholarly publishing has traveled a long way from serving as a printer to scholars in Renaissance culture to functioning as gatekeeper of truth in science and humanities. Indeed, at this time, there is scarcely a tenure decision undertaken at a major university that fails to take into account the publishing history of the individual under consideration. In not a few instances, the scholarly press provides the essential *bona fides* in the form of referee reports that may not determine the truth and falsity of a scholar's work, but certainly determines whether the scholar shall survive or perish in a given university. Given this considerable shift in obligation from academic department to editorial department, the world of scholarly communication has tended to err on the side of severity and caution.

Linkages between universities and their presses have come full cycle. What started out as university support for scholarly publications has reached a point at which the quality of the university press attachment comes to define the worth of the university as such. Charges of slipshod refereeing, ideological bias, or poor management now reflect on the status of the university as a whole. In such a context, the issue of maintaining standards of truth is akin to beating a straw man to death. These concerns for accuracy are built into the socialization process of scholarly communication. As a result, the real wonder is less the occasional fraudulent work that slips through the net than the rarity of such an event. Controversies concerning authenticity of historical documentation or laboratory experimentation are so rare that they cause newspaper headlines and stirrings among university managements. In such a climate of opinion, the emphasis on an occasional mistaken publishing judgment in releasing an unsound work must be seen as a minor issue in the world of scholarly communication.

Aiming for the goal of truth in what is published is certainly no less compelling in commercial or trade publishing than in scholarly communications. The problem is that possibilities for deceit are simply greater in trade publishing, not so much because of the greed of one kind of publisher and the altruism of the other, or because one employs lower editorial standards and does not have its books professionally reviewed. Scholarly communication is simply different, more intimate, in its nature. Individuals doing research are well-known to each other, publishing parameters are clearly established, and professional constraints or claims are far easier to maintain than is allowed for in trade publishing.

Gatekeeping issues about truth, as opposed to merit, must be tempered by concerns about censorship. In the case of presumably serious works published in a commercial manner, the question of accuracy has often been more problematic, even as it becomes less important. James Watson's *The Double Helix* may not be an absolutely accurate description of the priorities in the discovery of the structure of DNA. Immanual Velikovsky's *Worlds of Collision* may be nonsense or an apt, albeit speculative, recounting of how our planetary system was formed. Resolving these questions is not the publisher's responsibility. In the case of the commercial publication of books by individuals whose reputation rests on their scholarly achievements, the concerns and the responsibility still belong primarily to the scientific community. That community has ample access to publishers, commercial and scholarly, to make known its objections after publication. Martin Gardner in *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* has made a decent living exposing fraud and chicanery in scientific writing. In the world of politics, where the content of truth is filtered through a series of ideological strainers, it may be dangerous to insist on canons of pure truth. It is both simpler and more efficient that the public is made aware of possible biases and sentiments through the postpublication reviewing process than a denial to channels of communications in the name of truths—often little more than ideological biases or dictatorial wills.

There are a variety of techniques employed by publishers in both trade and scholarly activities to reduce the probability of issuing fraudulent or plagiarized materials. They

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles*:

Singers of Tales

"Literature is not like music; it isn't for the young; there are not prodigies in writing. The knowledge or experience a writer seeks to transmit is social or sentimental; it takes time, it can take much of a man's life, to process that experience to understand what he has been through; and it takes great care and tact, then, for the nature of the experience not to be lost, not to be diluted by the wrong forms. The other man's forms served the other man's thoughts."

—from "Some Thoughts on Being a Writer" by V.S. Naipaul

ALSO

Frederick Turner rescues story from history

Fred Chappell entertains a visionary company of fantasy writers

Leon Steinmetz introduces fiction into *Chronicles* with "A Child's Joke"

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include a heavy reliance upon established authors, firmly drawn parameters of fields of interest, the much mentioned multiple referee processing of manuscripts, down to more mundane matters of insistence upon a ribbon copy and verifiable author questionnaires. While no one mechanism is foolproof, as a collection of safeguards these work relatively well. The problem is that they may work too well. The tendency of publishers to operate within well-defined limits often leads to an overconservatized view of the marketplace and a corresponding suspicion, if not breakdown, in innovation. Thus, extreme caution may have the effect of drying up the wellsprings of creativity, and moreover rejecting manuscripts that may be useful to publish, albeit risky on the surface.

The present condition of scholarly journal publishing indicates how serious the problem of the overconservative approach to truthmaking can become. In the social sciences, at least, most journals have such finely tuned methodological criteria for publication that the method rather than the findings, or even the theory, become central. The wide gap in style and substance between book and journal publishing in the social sciences is indicative of this gap between information and knowledge. For book publishers to adopt the same standards of rigor is to guarantee an even smaller audience base for their products than currently exists and a choking-off of an area of creative communication currently not available in the journal publications area. Tightening the screws on the truth-error continuum may have the opposite impact of drying up the innovation-convention continuum. In such an environment, to err once in a while in the publication of a manuscript may be far easier than tightening yet further the criteria of publication altogether.

Karl Marx, in an early essay "Remarks on the New Instructions to the Prussian Censors" neatly expresses the rationale behind most publishers' reluctance to censor: "Are we to understand quite simply that *truth* is what the *government ordains?* . . . Freely shall you write, but let every word be a genuflection toward the liberal censor who approves your modest, serious good judgment. Be sure that you do not lose a consciousness of humility." With these mocking words, Marx made plain that the problem for democratic society is less the occasional charlatan or liar who carries off a literary swindle than the much more frequent demands by the state and, in our age, the State Publishing House, to protect the public by preventing access to controversial materials. The best safeguard against fraud is a free and untrammeled publishing network. Fail-safe systems urged by those who would make the publisher a Guardian of Truth represent a cure far worse than the disease. Truth can be guaranteed when the exclusive publisher is the Government Printing Office. But a democratic culture must be protected from that kind of perfection.

REVISIONS

Electronic Surveillance

The revolution in electronics—television, information processing, home video—has been greeted by almost universal dismay. Apart from a few Pollyannas like Alvin Toffler, the new technologies are seen, by liberals and Marxists alike, as instruments of coercion by which the mass mind will be stamped with the official ideology of (in the Orwellian liberal version) the state or (in the next Marxist version) the bourgeoisie. Hardly anyone had looked seriously at what impact the computer chip and the video screen would have on the politics of a democratic society. In *Communicating Ideas*, Irving Louis Horowitz takes a serious but largely optimistic view of the expanding informational opportunities that are open to American consumers. As a political sociologist and academic publisher (he is president of Transaction), Horowitz is acutely aware of the political aspects of communications, and his discussion ranges the spectrum from scholarly publishing to satellite television.

Particularly welcome is Horowitz's hard look at the new Luddites, a combination of disgruntled computer pioneers, political radicals, and disappointed utopians. While the original Luddites had legitimate grievances—skilled, independent craftsmen reduced to the level of hired help—the antitechnology doomsayers have little to complain of. None has a reactionary or agrarian vision of society; most oppose the electronic revolutions on no better grounds than nostalgia for the better days of the 1940's and 50's. By themselves, computers and cable television will not replace print, much less subjugate the American mind. As Horowitz points out, recent developments make possible a more democratic society with a greater variety of choices. (Who watches network TV anymore, except for a few favorite shows?)

Horowitz's optimism may not be entirely justified but not because electronic technology is by its nature the instrument of Big Brother or Daddy Warbucks. However, in a nation with an educational system like ours (initially mediocre and rapidly disintegrating into programmed imbecility), intellectual choice is inevitably restricted. In a country where even the print technology of books, magazines, and newspapers has become the agent of thought control, a similar fate may await the computer. What is remarkable is that so far personal computers, cable and satellite television, and home video have been a liberating experience for intelligent consumers, and yet all that we hear from the best and brightest is to the opposite effect. Perhaps they know the truth and are terrified by the prospect of intellectual freedom. In any event, Horowitz's book should be read and studied by anyone interested in the communication of ideas.

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A Month of Woes *by Henry Regnery*

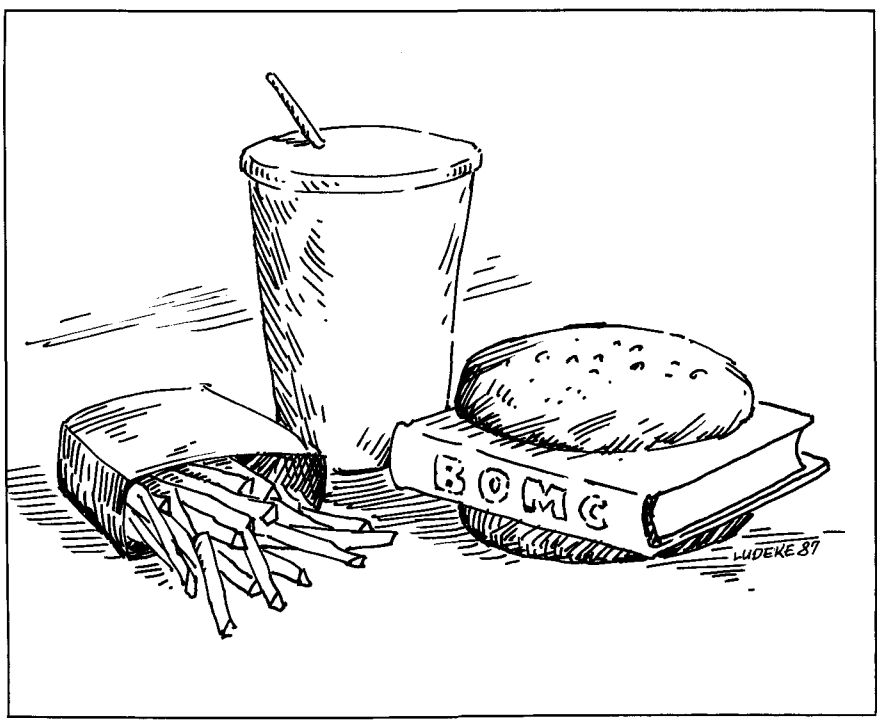
"Evening must usher night, night urge the morrow, month follow month with woe, and year wake year to sorrow."

—Shelley

***The Book of the Month: Sixty Years of Books in American Life*, edited by Al Silverman, Boston: Little, Brown; $17.95.**

The Book-of-the-Month Club, now in its 60th year, is an American success story in the grand manner—its financial success demonstrated by listing on the New York Stock Exchange and later acquisition by Time, Inc., its merchandising skill by some two million members, book buyers all, in every part of the country. During its first 20 years, the Club sent "100 million books into the nation's households." The 60-year total must be a staggering figure.

The founder of the Club, Harry Scherman, was born and grew up in Philadelphia, but while still at the Wharton School for Business was lured to New York to work in an advertising agency. His considerable talent for writing copy for direct mail and a successful book promotion or two led almost inevitably to the founding of his book club, to which his most innovative contribution, perhaps, was the concept of a panel of judges with established literary reputations, who were to select the books. As Scherman explained it, "You had to set up some kind of authority so that subscribers would feel that there was some reason for buying a group of books." In a country with relatively few bookstores, readers in the most out-of-the-way places would be offered each month the most significant or the best book as chosen for them by a panel of literary heavyweights. The first judges were Henry Seidel Canby, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, William Allen White, Heywood Broun, and Christopher Morley. John P. Marquand served for a time as did Gilbert Highet; the Club has had 18 judges in its 60 years. The present members of the board are Clifton Fadiman, John K. Hutchens, Wilfrid Sheed, Mordecai Richler, David Willis McCullough, and Gloria Norris.



At first the Club offered a main selection each month and one alternate, sometimes two; now it offers a dozen new alternates each month and a backlist of 125 books. "Club members," Mr. Silverman tells us, "that family of intelligent book readers grown more intelligent and sophisticated in their reading tastes over the years, now make their choices from a rich variety of possibilities." The Club's selections, however, do not indicate a generation of book readers "grown more intelligent and sophisticated over the years"; it appears to me, in fact, that the selections of the Club as well as the reports describing the selections show a distinct decline in taste and literary standards.

The Club's 60 years of decline in literary standards can be documented by comparing the selections during the first decades of the Club, and the reports to its members, with those of the recent past. Not every book chosen during the first years of the Club is likely to survive as a classic or even to be long remembered, but a number have already stood the test of time—Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*—but more impressive, in a way, than the selections

Henry Regnery is chairman of Regnery Gateway.

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themselves, which can be no better than the books authors and publishers make available, is the quality of many of the reports of books during those first years, which are the work of the Club's judges and staff. Christopher Morley's report on Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man*, to mention a striking example, is not literary "hype" but serious criticism. It lets the reader know what to expect: "It is told entirely in crisp, blunt, sometimes brutal, dialogue. It is done with remarkable skill. . . . It comes uncomfortably close to the realities of New York murder: sordid, grim, steeped in alcohol." His review of a very different kind of book, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, is literary criticism on a high level —judicious, beautifully written, it helps the reader to understand the circumstances and deeper meaning of the story. An essay by Randolph Churchill, "Captain Evelyn Waugh," is equally satisfying—"His favorite novelist," we are told, "is Trollope. He has never read *Gone With the Wind* and never will. He cannot drive a motorcar. He would prefer to receive a knighthood than to have his book selected as the book-of-the-month." There are other distinguished reviews during those early years of the Club, several by Christopher Morley, Clifton Fadiman's review of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*. But I was particularly impressed by Dorothy Canfield Fisher's review and sharp criticism of John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* and the fact that it was sent to the members of the Club at all, because it seems clear that it was written to induce them *not* to buy the book. "The point is," Mrs. Fisher tells her readers, " . . . that it is one of those books with no great inherent importance which sum up a literary tendency. Ever since the war, one school of fiction has been pushing farther and farther toward what they call honesty. 'Honesty' for them is a denial of any important springs of human action except alcohol and sex, and the use of bald outspoken vocabulary in calling attention to the usually not-mentioned functions and organs of the human body. . . . It will be called a picture of life, and so it is, a jazzed up picture of a singularly unimportant section of life." It is probably just as well that Mrs. Fisher didn't live to experience some of the more recent selections of the Club, those, for example, by John Irving or John Updike, or E.L. Doctorow, whom Bryan Griffin aptly describes in *Panic Among the Philistines* as "a popular writer of rather smutty political novels."

Books by such writers as John Updike, John Irving, or E.L. Doctorow are not the only selections during recent years, but they take a prominent place in the book under review and mark a sharp contrast with the character of the books selected in earlier years. Irving's *The World According to Garp* is reviewed by Mordecai Richler, "the Club's demon judge from Canada," as he is described, who is given credit for helping "to introduce Irving to the reading public." *Garp*, Mr. Richler tells us, "is a loopy novel of inspired anarchy." Garp and his wife, Helen, "have two adorable children. They love each other. Garp proves vulnerable to pretty baby sitters, and Helen, an English professor by this time, indulges in a meaningless affair with one of her students. Bizarre incidents proliferate. So does rape. So does murder. So does emasculation of Helen's lover." But however sordid and demeaning all this may be, the novel is redeemed, we are assured, "by a disarming tenderness and a large talent that announces itself on practically every page." One other book by John Irving, *The Cider House Rules*, is reviewed in the history. The fact that two of the 60 books chosen to represent the history of the Book-of-the-Month Club are by John Irving says something about the esteem with which he is presently regarded among the Club's authors. Whittaker Chambers' *Witness*, by way of contrast, which was a selection, is not mentioned in the history, although John P. Marquand, in the Club's report to its members, praises it as " . . . the best explanation yet to be presented of the Communist mind and the Communist climate" and concludes, "The book was not written as literature, but literature it is of a high order."

John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* is reviewed by David McCullough. He describes the three "witches" as "blousy suburban retreads of the three classical Graces. Not that their lives are all that graceful. Their frantic love affairs may remind seasoned Updike readers of the bed-hopping wives in his earlier novel *Couples*, since, as he puts it here, 'being a divorcess in a small town is like playing Monopoly; eventually you land on all the properties.'" The reviewer comes to no particular conclusion about the book, nor recommends it beyond mentioning the "frank sex scenes," and concluding, "John Updike has given us a witches' sabbath to remember."

Considering my rather slight firsthand acquaintance with Updike and Irving, it may appear presumptuous of me to make any generalizations about them, but the temptation is irresistible. Although not a seasoned TV-watcher, either—we don't even own one—I am prepared to make the statement, on the basis particularly of Updike's *Of the Farm* and Irving's *Garp*, that such books are written for people whose mental horizons are strongly influenced, if not determined, by television. There is no coherent development, only a series of more or less unrelated incidents. Everything is described in great detail so that nothing in the way of participation is demanded of the reader, who is treated as a viewer and nothing more.

A review of the history of the Book-of-the-Month Club necessarily becomes a review of the Book Club itself. When Harry Scherman first launched his project, I remember, the objection was raised that it would have the effect of standardizing the taste and reading habits of all those thousands of Book Club members in every part of the country, receiving and obediently reading the monthly selection chosen for them by a small group of judges in New York. Al Silverman, in his introduction, meets this objection by pointing out that the members of the Club can, if they wish, order the monthly selection, but they may also choose from a large group of other books. As a matter of fact, in whatever fashion the Book Club operates, the reading habits of the whole country, or at least a substantial part of it, are largely determined by a small group of people in New York, whether or not they help select books for the Club—the people, that is, who write the reviews that appear in the *New York Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *Publishers Weekly*, or the *Library Journal*. It is the opinions of this

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small group of people which have much to do with which books make the best-seller lists, which books the libraries buy, which books are picked up for review in other publications, and, therefore, the reading habits of all those people who like to feel that they belong to the intellectual elite. I find it hard to believe that people from Maine to California would have paid good money to buy such a book as *The World According to Garp* if the New York literary establishment had not recommended it with such cant phrases as "rich and humorous" (the *New York Times*), "Superb . . . the imagination soars as Irving draws us inexorably into Garp's world" (*Publishers Weekly*). By sending *Garp* to its members, therefore, the Book Club didn't contribute to the standardizing of the taste of the country; that had already been done. The Book Club was merely following the lead of the literary establishment.

With the reports to its members of these books still in mind, it is instructive to compare them with a very different kind of review of a very different kind of book: Clifton Fadiman's 1948 review of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*:

> Scobie is maneuvered, without his quite knowing how it has come about, into a position where he must partake of Communion in a state of sin. This to him means quite literally eternal damnation. The scene at the altar rail in which this man, hungering for God, torn with guilt and quite unconscious of the heroic beauty of his own character, takes God into himself and condemns himself in his own mind to an eternity of deprivation, is one of the most moving I have encountered in recent novels. Its intensity is exceeded only by the final chapters in which Scobie finds himself forced to commit the final unforgivable sin which puts the human soul outside the mercy of God—self destruction in a condition of despair.

Such a review and the book it describes seem to come from a world different from *Garp* or *The Witches of Eastwick*. It is interesting to speculate whether the standards of the American people have changed as drastically as Silverman's history seems to indicate. Or is it the standards of the Book-of-the-Month Club that have changed?

Harvard Goes South *by Clyde Wilson*

"Ce sonts les modernes qui font des progrès. Nous sommes bêtes une fois pour toutes."

—Péguy

Tombee: Portrait of a Cotton Planter **by Theodore Rosengarten, New York: William Morrow; $24.95.**

This curious big book is an amalgam of left-wing scholarship and commercial panache. On the one hand, the author, a Harvard Ph.D. in American Civilization and a missionary to South Carolina, seems to have enjoyed extended foundation support during the production of this book, as well as a good deal of paid assistance in the drudgery of transcription and research. And his work has received respectful attention in both the *New York Times* and the *New York Times Book Review*.

On the other hand, a generous publisher has secured for *Tombee* a book-club selection and has allowed the author an indulgent 750 pages to present the biography and diary of a relatively obscure and historically insignificant planter on the Sea Islands of the South Carolina coast. The chain bookstores, in my portion of the Union at least, were piled high with copies of *Tombee* for the Christmas trade, suggesting a hope of capitalizing on the century-and-a-half-old preoccupation of the American reading public with the Old South that made best-sellers out of Uncle Tom, Uncle Remus, "Marse Chan," *Gone With the Wind*, and *Roots*.

Contained within these bulging covers are two potentially good books, each about a third the size of the artifact that exists. The author seems to have discovered, or rather to have had pointed out to him, the existence of an intimate journal of Thomas B. Chaplin, kept over a period of many years. Chaplin was a planter in the isolated region between St. Helena and Port Royal Sounds inhabited by a few dozen planter families and some thousands of slaves. Leave aside the fact that among those few white families were a number of remarkable men (and women), Elliotts, Rhetts, Seabrooks, and others, of whom Chaplin was probably the least interesting. Leave aside the fact that there are dozens, possibly hundreds, of other planter diaries in existence that are equally or more important than Chaplin's. (One sometimes gets the sense that this one has assumed immense importance among the intelligentsia of the Northeast *because it was the one* read by someone from Harvard.) Leave aside the fact that there are certainly dozens of scholars equally qualified to present this material to the reading public as Mr. Rosengarten. Still, Chaplin's diary is an extended, intimate, and candid record of real life in a vanished part of America. And it is always good to have historical sources made readily available. Thus, the publication of Chaplin's diary, appropriately introduced and annotated, would have been a valuable scholarly contribution.

Unfortunately, while it remains valuable, the value is compromised by the author's statement that he cut out a third of the original material. While he describes in several pages himself going about constructing the "published diary" out of the original, his

Clyde Wilson is a backward Southern historian who does his own research.

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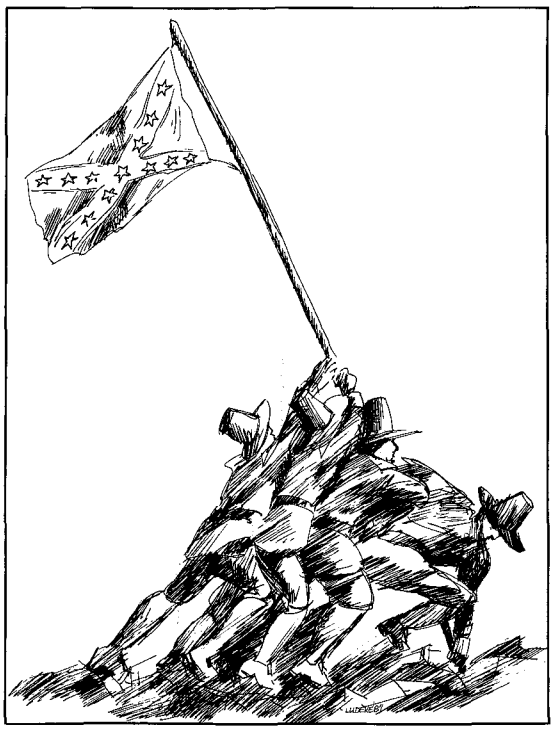
discussion of his editorial procedures is so subjective that he never really meets the basic scholarly requirement of indicating fully the nature of the omitted material.

On the other hand, one might have made use of the diary and other sources and written an interesting short biography of Chaplin, which would have been more useful than the author's decision to present both an abridged diary and an overextended biography. Like most of his neighbors, Chaplin was an able sportsman and Confederate soldier. Unlike most of his neighbors, he was not a successful agriculturalist. His fortunes declined even before the war and he engaged in a protracted tedious litigation with his stepfather. After the war, like many other 19th-century Americans who lacked nonaddictive pain-killers, he became a dope fiend, which perhaps explains part of his presumed appeal to the contemporary reading public. One might argue that some of his more significant neighbors would have made a better study, should one want to examine in depth the society of the Sea Islands, which was somewhat peculiar by Southern or even by South Carolina standards. But there is a great historical value in studying the more ordinary level in any situation, and I have no quarrel with the selection of subject. Rosengarten's approach is in the familiar genre of the psychosocial, by which we have learned that beneath their stern exteriors our 19th-century forefathers were quite often as human (i.e., screwed up) as we are. That is fine and well worth knowing, so long as it is kept in perspective with other historical considerations.

A good deal of value and interest emerges from the biographical treatment. Its flaws are two. First, there is no true historical perspective. The reader never quite escapes from the awareness that he is being lectured by a superior modern observer on the political, social, moral, and character shortcomings of other men of another day and place. Though his actions and comments are described fully, one will never understand, from this source alone, what made Chaplin tick. His political beliefs, for instance, are never made meaningful because the author cannot really believe that they were real, serious, inherited, and rational in Chaplin's world and not just a smoke screen to fool observers.

Secondly, the author felt impelled to frame his biography with an extended and digressive history of the Sea Island region and of South Carolina from early colonial times through Reconstruction. Where first-rate secondary sources exist, as for the Reconstruction period, this is fairly successful. On the whole, it is not. John C. Calhoun dies in the wrong month. Robert Barnwell Rhett, foremost of the fire-eaters, is described as a "provincial." Rhett was a Southern nationalist, and Rosengarten is free to disapprove of him; however, he was not a "provincial," as any rudimentary perusal of his correspondence or career will indicate. To characterize a complicated historical figure in this way is little more than sloganeering. At another level the author tells us, "On the eve of secession, the great majority of white people in South Carolina did not own any slaves." From this statement he proceeds to an extended discussion of the beliefs and motives of the nonslaveholding farmers, about whom he surely knows less than I know about Paraguayans. But the whole discussion is pointless. The most salient fact about antebellum South Carolina was that nearly one-half of the body of citizens were slaveowners and that, unlike any other American state, there was no "great majority" of nonslaveholding farmers.

Such missteps are trivial taken alone, but cumulatively they suggest a level of historianship somewhat lower than *Tombee* aspires to. Should you wish to learn something about the Sea Island planters, let me suggest you pass up *Tombee* and turn to a book by one of their number that is a classic expression of their spirit—*Carolina Sports by Land and Water* (1846) by William Elliott, which is a good deal more than its title suggests. Or you might turn to the letters of the Jones family from the adjacent region of Georgia, letters published a few years ago as *The Children of Pride*. Should you want the larger history of the Sea Islands, look at Willie Lee Rose's *Rehearsal for Reconstruction* (1964), where it is concisely and reliably presented by a master historian. And the black experience is beautifully rendered in Charles W. Joyner's *Down by the Riverside* (1984),



which concentrates on another but similar region of the South Carolina Low Country.

There is little in *Tombee* that the specialist cannot find more reliably elsewhere. Nevertheless, the book has already achieved the critical acclaim which it sought and which was doubtless fore-ordained. I am not apprised of the degree of its commercial success. Presumably, there are still some thousands of "general readers" tucked away in odd corners across that great forest of satellite dishes that make up American culture. But, I suspect, *Tombee* will prove a bit too heavy and too cynical for them, and too bulky for the Hilton Head tourist trade.

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Reenchanting the World *by Herbert Schlossberg*

"Do not seek to become a god."

—Pindar

Unmasking the New Age by Douglas R. Groothius, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; $6.95.

Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism by Gary North, Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press; $19.95.

> Once we begin to see that we are all God, that we all have the attributes of God, then I think the whole purpose of human life is to reown the Godlikeness within us; the perfect love, the perfect wisdom, the perfect understanding, the perfect intelligence, and when we do that, we create back to that old, that essential oneness which is consciousness.

This is the religious philosophy being taught to students in the Los Angeles public schools, as part of a Federally funded project. Where is the ACLU now that we need it?

Kant has few readers outside of university philosophy departments, but his influence obviously extends to Los Angeles. Part of Kant's legacy to the modern world is the iron curtain that seals off all reality into two compartments: that which can be known by the senses—phenomena—and that which cannot be known by the senses—noumena. The latter includes the objects we normally associate with the religious: God, spirit, immortal soul, and so on. One of the unintended effects of this effort was to provide an excuse for ignoring the noumenal world. What modern man cannot know through the senses, he feels safe in dismissing from further consideration. One of the first and most notable casualties of this reasoning is the idea of purpose. The senses are silent on such topics. The response of Nietzsche and the existentialists was a sometimes stoical despair. The naive managed to keep up the cheerful scientism that characterizes the work of scientific publicists like Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan, but the official grin of 19th-century optimism is beginning to resemble the rictus of a corpse.

Coexisting with such thinking throughout much of the last century-and-a-half, especially in Europe, was the philosophy of Hegel. His all-pervading spirit was a sophisticated contra-Kantian development of what Aldous Huxley called the "perennial philosophy." Thus pantheism was the religion—often unacknowledged—of a great many of those in the 19th-century intellectual classes who did not subscribe to scientism. Ernst Troeltsch, early in this century, surveyed the German Protestant church and found it to be largely pantheist in

Herbert Schlossberg, author of Idols for Destruction *(Thomas Nelson, 1983), lives in Minneapolis.*

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orientation.

This suggests that a simple-minded scientism, artificially and naively extended in time by the Asimovs and the Sagans, was only a passing phase, that its inherent instability was such that it had to give way before long. It is remarkable that it lasted as long as it did, but that long life was largely a phenomenon of the English-speaking world. Writing in *The Idea of Nature* (1945), British philosopher R.G. Collingwood contended that its passing marked the end of a temporary aberration in intellectual history and a return to the mainstream of European thought.

There were prophets early in the century, who, observing the single-minded mania of the science-boosters, could see that it had to come to an end. Oswald Spengler, in his massive two-volume tome *The Decline of the West*, predicted that the prevalent materialism would become unbearable and that people would feel impelled to toy with weird cults as a means of escape. Max Weber, in his three-volume *Economy and Society*, prophesied that phenomenal man would collapse into emotionalism and irrationality, which would be the prelude for the increase of centralized political power.

If we read the Humanist Manifestos of 1933 and 1973 or innumerable documents from educators, lawyers, political parties, professional groups, and journalists, we see that, by and large, they're expressions of the Kantian phenomenal branch of modernism. They assume that history is self-contained; that legal and ethical norms are mere conventions; that salvation comes by human endeavor; that science has provided (or will provide) all that we need to know and to have; that there is no valid expression of the supernatural possible; that all meaning comes from human definition and, hence, is arbitrary. In other words, these writings are forms of what has come to be called in some circles "secular humanism." This is what is on the way out. But what is going to replace it? Will it be the Christian alternative that it began displacing in the 18th century, or will it be something else?

Gary North, in *Unholy Spirits*, sees the crucial phase of the change in the United States as the mid-1960's. The open eccentricities of the counterculture provided the most visible manifestations, but the essence of the movement—not widely recognized at the time—was a rejection of the merely phenomenal in favor of the noumenal. As the leader of a Satan-worshiping cult put it, "When people come in here, they're expected to park their brains at the door." It was the end of what Weber had called the "disenchantment of the world"—which had been mainly the contribution of Christian ideas in the West, the thinking which had made science possible. The spooks had returned, with a vengeance.

The remarkable thing was that it seemed to happen overnight. In the dim recesses had lurked philosophical idealism, religious mysticism, Eastern religion, the remnants of witchcraft and other esoteric manifestations of the noumenal; but now, as if they had received the long-awaited signal that the Trojans were asleep, they sprang fully formed from where they had lain hidden. Hard as it is to believe, the spooks were joined by science. The work of Heisenberg and Plank had undercut the hard atoms and determinism of the Newtonian world view, replacing the old certainties with new uncertainties.

If physics—supposedly that hardest of the hard sciences—could foster mysticism, then why be surprised that the social sciences should follow suit? Carlos Castaneda was able to use his alleged conversations with a Mexican shaman as the basis for a sympathetic portrayal in a doctoral dissertation that made witchcraft respectable. The popularity of his later books is convincing proof that the public caught up to—or did it lead?—the academics.

My favorite prophet in this monumental change is the Harvard theology professor Harvey Cox. Cox is not the sort of seer who hears the voice of God or uses sheep entrails to divine the future. He's an expert, rather, at doping out changing trends and recutting his philosophy to fit. Cox is the preeminent theologian of fashion. In 1965 he published *The Secular City*, his paeon to secularity, to the phenomenal world which was leading us to an earthly paradise. Cox relied heavily on the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who argued that in the 20th century man would not need religion as a shield or as an explanation for reality. But Cox published his book at precisely the moment in history when it was being proved wrong. He repented swiftly and began work on *The Feast of Fools*, which appeared in 1969. The subtitle of this volume was *A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy*, and that was a good indication that he had rejected the gray-flannel-suit mentality that had dominated his earlier book. Looking around at all the bizarre goings-on of the 60's—the denial of rationality and the exaltation of fantasy—Cox pronounced it good: For him irrationality had become a Christian virtue.

In retrospect, we can see that *The Feast of Fools* was only a way station. There is, after all, a certain flimsiness, hence instability, to a position that says that human rationality is a function of our creation in the image of God, on the one hand, and denying the efficacy of reason on the other hand. To exalt the irrational on a basis that has some inner consistency, one would have to depart more frankly and decisively from the biblical roots. Cox did that in 1977 with the publication of *Turning East: The Promise and Peril of the New Orientalism*, a frank exaltation of Eastern pantheism and a call for its incorporation into American religion and culture.

It is hard to say how influential these books have been, although it is certain they haven't raised the stir that *The Secular City* did. In any case, Cox's variety of prophet does not lead the way so much as show that the trail blazed by others has shifted direction. With the appearance in 1980 of Marilyn Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, the movement had its own chronicler, who revealed that far from remaining an exotic plant, oriental thinking had become domesticated and made suitable for the tastes of Western sophisticates. Ferguson was also able to document the number of "normal" pursuits and institutions—like the corporation and the academic discipline—which had been permeated by New Age thinking.

The New Age religion did not have to rely on shamanism, witchcraft, and overt demonism. Now there were intellectuals like Erich Fromm, Carl

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Rogers, George Leonard, William Irwin Thompson, and Theodore Roszak—not to mention Shirley MacLaine. Respectable causes like holistic health and the human potential movement in psychology became havens for New Age thinking. The affinity between the new psychics and pantheism brought in scientific recruits like physicist Fritjof Capra of Berkeley. Consulting groups, such as the Pacific Institute, provided sanitized versions of mystical philosophy for corporations and government agencies including those of the intelligence and defense establishments. Perhaps sensing yet another arena in which they were being left in the dust, Soviet research teams have been focusing enormous resources on the paranormal, unconsciously inviting a redefinition of the term "scientific socialism."

Naive souls might have expected to find the churches in the forefront in exposing this assault on the primary principles of Christian faith, but that has hardly been the case. The mainline Protestant denominations are lost in their accustomed sleep from which they awaken only to posture about sanctuary or apartheid. On the other hand, the Evangelicals have produced popular works alerting those willing to be alerted of the coming tide. British sociologist Os Guinness' interpretation of the counterculture of the 60's, *The Dust of Death* (1971), and James Sire's taxonomic study, *The Universe Next Door* (1976), had considerable material on the philosophic roots and the practical outworkings of the movement in their overtly mystical forms.

However, it was not until 1983 that there appeared the serious exposés of the New Age movement in its now characteristic forms—that is, the "secular" forms attractive to the educated middle class: Constance Cumbey's *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* and Dave Hunt's *Peace, Prosperity and the Coming Holocaust*. Hunt followed that two years later with *The Seduction of Christianity*, which was an exposition, naming names, of the ways in which New Age thinking had been infiltrating into Christian groups. Cumbey and Hunt would have reached wider audiences if their books were not tied to the apocalyptic premillennialism that appeals to so many fundamentalist groups.

By contrast, both Groothius and North write in the tradition of reformed Christianity. *Unmasking the New Age* is a straightforward, general survey of the movement's manifestations in American society. Groothius' six identifying marks of the movement may be redundant but serve to illus-

REVISIONS

A Neglected Master

Virtually unknown in the United States, the Australian Randolph Stow is one of the most powerful and original novelists at work today. We ran across a mention of his work in the catalog of his publisher (Taplinger) two years ago and have been meaning to devote a major essay to him ever since. This issue, however, provides a good occasion for drawing the attention of our readers to the work of an important writer who is virtually ignored by New York critics.

Stow has led a strange life, and many of his books chronicle, to some extent, his experiences growing up in Western Australia—a region so distinctive that it once attempted to secede (*The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*)—working at a mission station for aborigines (*To the Islands*) and as assistant to the Government Anthropologist in New Guinea (*The Visitants*) until his health failed him. Since 1960 he has lived in England, where he went to recover (*The Girl Green as Elder Flower*). Despite the autobiographical element, Stow is far from being a "realist," much less a local-colorist, and his best work is tinged with mystery and the supernatural.

All of his published work is worth reading, but three stand out: *Tourmaline*, *The Girl Green as Elder Flower*, and *The Suburbs of Hell*. In all three, Stow beat his head against the other world (in *The Girl* he seems even to break through), and we hear the horns of Elfland blowing; but there is little whimsy or charm in these supernatural realms. It is more "perilous seas in faery lands forlorn." In *Tourmaline* a sun-baked mining town, almost deserted, witnesses the eruption of a revival cult, which by the end will be corrupted into an institution. There was nothing false in the town's brush with the supernatural. The narrator remarks, "Wild beasts were loose on the world. Terrors would come. But wonders, too, as in the past. Terrors and wonders, as always."

The strangest of Stow's books is *The Girl Green as Elder Flower*, a work impossible to describe without distortion. A colonial (South Africa, New Zealand, Australia) recovering from illness in Suffolk begins writing down local legends (contained in a 12th-century history written in Latin). As a sort of therapy he writes his own acquaintances and experiences into the tales. The results are haunting, if bizarre.

Stow's most recent book, *The Suburbs of Hell*, disappointed some even friendly reviewers. In my view, it is the best thing he's ever done. He succeeds in combining, for the first time, his exploration of the not-quite-normal with a powerful narrative line which makes the work accessible to even the casual reader of thrillers. Indeed, *Suburbs* is a mystery novel about a series of killings in a seaside town. Like the great exemplar of all detective fiction, Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Stow's novel tells us a great deal more than who done it.

These few words hardly do justice to Stow's talent (or the faith of his publisher), but they should serve as a warning to anyone who thinks the novel is dead on the strength of what is written in the *New York Review of Books*. I have never seen a Randolph Stow novel in a bookstore, but Taplinger's address is 132 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011.

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trate the unitarian mentality of New Agers: (1) All is one. Differences are apparent only, without ontological standing; (2) All is God. The divine essence is everywhere and in everything; (3) Humanity is God. (Good news for the would-be divinities, who take their cue from *The Next Whole Earth Catalogue*: "We are as Gods and might as well get good at it."); (4) A change in consciousness. If we fail to see the unity of everything and understand our own status as gods, the fault lies in bad thinking. We can raise our consciousness on classic Asian religions, or for lazy Americans there are quick fixes like est; (5) All religions are one—all roads going to the same place and all that. Similarly no systems of thought are unique, and no religions either. So watch out when they talk of the "Christ event"; they mean something else; (6) Cosmic evolutionary optimism. The unfolding of the world divinity in history means everything keeps getting better all the time. Much of Groothius' book is a fleshing out of the premises of the six marks. He's particularly good at showing the inroads of New Age thinking in the ordinary affairs of American life.

Unholy Spirits is a very different book. This fat tome, originally published 10 years ago under another title, has now been brought up to date with a good deal of fresh material. The first chapter alone, entitled "The Crisis of Western Rationalism," is worth half the price of admission. The bulk of *Unholy Spirits* is taken up with extended treatments of some of the weirder aspects of the movement. North has read his Edgar Cayce, Carlos Castaneda, the androgyny propaganda, the meticulously documented and filmed instances of occult healing, Kirlian photography, and so on. He has refused to get caught in the Kantian trap. Having rejected the old rationalism, now breaking up on the rocks, he also sees the disaster wrought by the mystical void. He's done that by finding common ground for the worlds of flesh and spirit, a unifying conception for the One and the Many. And he finds it the same place Groothius does—in the orthodox Christian faith.

As the century wears on, that faith may once again resemble an embattled sect struggling against the forces of a bizarre and sometimes brutal pantheism.

Republican Vices *by Buddy Matthews*

The New Republic: A Voice of Modern Liberalism **by David Seideman, New York: Praeger Publishers; $32.95.**

For some 73 years, since November 1914, *The New Republic* has been the self-constructed soapbox for the best ideas and insights proffered by the liberal intellectual community (which may explain why the magazine is always so thin). Some of the most important names in American liberalism have graced the magazine's pages as it has laid out its plan for a new America.

What exactly has been that plan? In his new book examining the first 25 years of *TNR*, David Seideman, who worked at *TNR* from 1979 to 1986 and edited the magazine's special 70th anniversary issue in 1984, explains in the Preface:

> In the first half of the 20th century, the forward momentum of U.S. history seemed stalled. The previous century's scattered and diffused economic and political institutions proved ill-equipped to master the complexities of the modern industrial age. The traditional liberal principles of individual rights and natural freedom impeded national progress. During both active and dormant areas, *TNR* guided the United States away from self-reliance and laissez-faire and toward collective identity through the active intervention of the state.

So far from expressing any remorse for the abridgment of liberties, Seideman continues, "No cause was ever as tirelessly and faithfully championed as social justice, a keystone for reform and civilized societies in the modern age. *TNR*'s editors believed a stronger central government was the means by which social justice could exist." Seideman makes it clear that for the early editors of *TNR*, the Soviet Union under Lenin and the younger Stalin would be the paradigm for those "civilized societies in the modern age."

As much as anything, *The New Republic* is an examination of the personalities and ideas that helped create the magazine. The magazine's financial backers were Dorothy and Willard Straight. The daughter of the very wealthy William C. Whitney, who made a bundle in streetcar lines and investments in Standard Oil, heiress Dorothy had more humanitarian concerns. Willard had a personal apprenticeship with Teddy Roosevelt before joining the J.P. Morgan firm.

With their vast accumulation of wealth, the Straights decided to back a magazine which would promote the distribution of wealth (everybody else's wealth) to the less fortunate or less productive members of society. (It's a pattern that would appear again and again in 20th-century America.) Herbert Croly was to be the editor of the weekly magazine while Walter Weyl, Walter Lippmann, and others would be added later. Eventually, it would sport Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Bruce Bliven, and economist George Soule.

In its first issue, the editors proclaimed that "*TNR* is frankly an experiment, it is an attempt to find a national audience for a journal of opinion." While not entirely new, issues and ideas journalism was to have a major impact on the publishing industry.

In an attempt to stress independence, the various editors were permitted to express their opinions freely, an action which sometimes led to clashes. In an effort to draw national attention, they called on the biggest names they could find. A partial but revealing list of the contributors includes John Dewey, Charles Beard (the historian

Buddy Matthews is a journalist based in Dallas.

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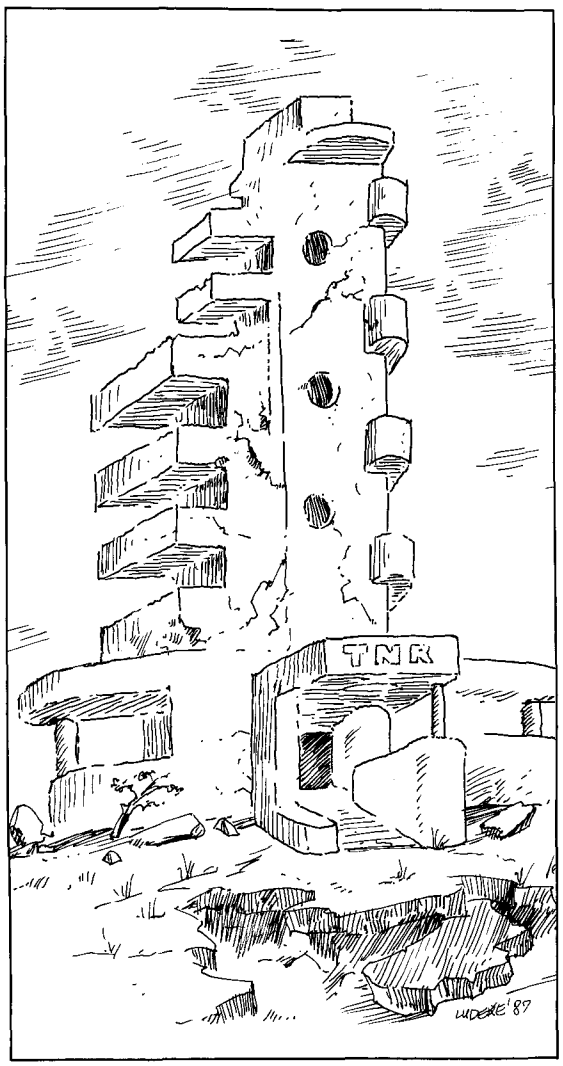
who saw the U.S. Constitution as a huge money-making scam), and the indefatigable John Reed (the only American buried in the Kremlin wall).

When this "progressive" hodge-podge of a magazine began appearing in print, it was received with mixed emotions. The magazine was not quite leftish enough for the real radicals, and, in the opinion of Willard Straight, it was a little too high-brow for almost everyone else. The magazine, he complained, was filled with too much opinion and not enough fact. "Lighten up the tone of the paper and give it a sugar-coating to get it across even with the semi-intelligent reader." It is tempting to suggest that the editors took Straight's advice by appealing to the "semi-intelligent" progressives who constitute the major part of the magazine's readership. In looking back over the early issues, it is interesting to compare the editorial wisdom with the actual course of events. *TNR* had been appearing for three years when the October Revolution of 1917 occurred. Many of the stated goals of the Communists were in harmony with American progressives and liberals. For over 20 years, *TNR* would be a defender of the revolution, and despite its close connections with Teddy Roosevelt and later Woodrow Wilson and even later FDR (after first denouncing him as too conservative), the magazine would also recommend Communist candidate Earl Browder for President in 1936.



The author recognizes this close ideological affinity, and, though he contends that the Communist Party never directly influenced the magazine's editorial position, he admits that "its unabashed romance with the Soviet Union attached it firmly to the party line in the international sphere." One of the less savory episodes in the romance came during Stalin's show trials. (You can find the back issues in any good library, and microfilm will preserve their infamy down to the last days.) *TNR* managing editor Bruce Bliven was a little concerned about the political impact Stalin's actions were having on the Communist cause worldwide. In "A Letter to Stalin" published in *TNR* on March 30, 1938, Bliven makes several suggestions.

"Soviet court procedure in most types of trials is admirable," Bliven states, but he suggests that Stalin use a style more compatible with the Anglo-Saxon and Roman tradition. "It may be unjust of the Americans, for example, to suspect that torture is used in these cases; but in the United States there is a nationwide and long continued tradition of police brutality, of extorting confessions by torture in every sort of case from petty larceny to murder. It is inevitable that this country should look with suspicion upon confessions obtained in secret hearings, however plausible these confessions may be on their face." Bliven also suggests that Stalin "publish every scrap of documentary evidence" in order to vindicate his integrity, that he abolish the death penalty (that's some suggestion for one of the world's greatest mass murderers), and that he create a "legal Opposition."

Bliven concludes with a revealing statement. "I am profoundly convinced that nothing you could do for the USSR by remaining in office for a length of time could be as great a service as the demonstration that among 190,000,000 comrades no one is indispensable, that those foreign critics who lump together 'Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini' have been altogether wrong."

Fortunately, the magazine would come to lament its former position on the Soviet government. It would have to do some more lamenting in the future. In the 80's, of course, *The New Republic* moved a tad to the right, by its own admission. If it did not learn from Stalin, and it did not learn from Mao, the magazine finally learned something from Ho. In an issue dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the fall of Saigon, some of the editors regretted that they took the wrong side on the Vietnam problem.

It's a little late, now that freedom is gone, and millions have been reeducated to their graves. As a leading journal of opinion opposing the war and a supporter of McGovern, *TNR* must bear a good deal of the moral responsibility.

In repentance, perhaps, the magazine did a long and well-reasoned piece on the foolishness of our agricultural policy, and Fred Barnes wrote a scathing article on National Public Radio's news program *All Things Considered*, entitled "All Things Distorted."

Experience keeps a dear school, as Poor Richard advised, and the "fools" at *TNR* have learned a few hard lessons. But instead of saying "I'm sorry" and shutting up (and shutting down), they continue to advise Americans on everything under the sun. The President's recent misadventures over Iran and the *contras*—about which *TNR* is sputtering in uncontrollable indignation—proceeded according to a script which might have been written by the magazine's global democrats. On most social and ethical questions, the present magazine is worse than its com-symp predecessors. Gay rights, pornography, and stuffy *avant-garde* novelists were not exactly Herbert Croly's cup of tea. *TNR* may have moved to the right on some issues, but on most questions it is as wrong as it ever was.

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U.S., A Captive Nation

by John C. Vinson

The Captive Public **by Benjamin Ginsberg, New York: Basic Books; $18.95.**

Benjamin Ginsberg's *The Captive Public* is a breath of fresh cynicism. With insight and illustration, it argues that mass opinion and majority will are not necessarily the nemesis of Big Brother. In modern society, Ginsberg argues, the Orwellian state can adapt and even mold them for its purposes.

Nor is this a new development. Ginsberg maintains that the emergence of public opinion as a political force was not so much a concession from the powers that be as a device to give their ruler greater legitimacy. Before the Industrial Revolution, his argument runs, authorities had little incentive to dwell on popular discontent. Poor communications and isolation tended to keep upheaval from spreading, and feudal economies, filling the royal coffers, continued to function despite localized troubles. But with the machine age, communications, and interdependence, rulers realized that discontent could cost them commerce, taxes, and possibly their lives.

Consequently, they sought to neutralize opposition, while appearing to yield to it, by extending free speech and elections. Ginsberg holds that free speech was not a great danger to the then rising bourgeois classes because they owned printing presses which could dominate discourse. Rather than fearing mass literacy, they promoted it, assuming a larger audience to read their ideas. This strategy of rule has application in our own day, for scarcely does a Communist revolution pass before the new regime boasts of increasing literacy. In the case of elections, the bourgeois strategy was to limit genuine options, while persuading the populace that ballots were better than bullets.

Nineteenth-century rulers generally sought to divert popular opinion into desired channels. They lacked the techniques and technology to do much more. Twentieth-century governments operate under less constraint. Their aim is to manufacture opinion from the start, then claim obedience to the popular will. Effective tools of the trade are advertising and public relations. Authentic public sentiments certainly persist, but would-be rulers, both liberal and conservative, says Ginsberg, are adept at molding them to fit personal and partisan agendas. "Put not your trust in Princes" should be the watchword of conservatives.

Another tool of control is the public opinion poll. Ginsberg endorses the repeated charge that polling is more a reflection of polling method and questions than genuine popular opinion. Too often, as well, polls can minimize the intensity of minority viewpoints by comparing them with opposing, though highly apathetic, majorities. If King George had had polls, he might have persuaded the American patriots that their cause was doomed for lack of support.

An even more sinister use of polls is that of political intelligence. By gaining adequate knowledge of public attitudes, rulers can take steps to thwart genuinely popular movements. Ginsberg reports that a number of Communist states have used polling for this purpose.

The final tool is refinement of the election to provide the illusion of choice. An example is the one party "election" in the Soviet Union which we Americans properly deride. And yet our own elections frequently offer only slightly different versions of Tweedledees and dums.

Ginsberg concludes by raising, but not answering, the question: Will Big Brother eventually assimilate all opinion? A question the author might have asked, but didn't: Is democracy itself sacrosanct, or possibly just another tool for rule?

Perhaps Ginsberg couldn't bring himself to squeeze the trigger on so sacred a cow as this. Few people today can. But it is instructive that the nation's Founders saw private and public virtue rather than majorities as the bulwark of liberty—a view rooted in classical antiquity and Christian sensibilities. (It was a majority, after all, that voted for the Crucifixion.)

John C. Vinson writes from Athens, Georgia.

Mistress of Deceit

by Ronald Berman

Shakespeare **by Germaine Greer, New York: Oxford University Press; $13.95.**

Oxford University Press advertises its Past Master series (of which this book is one) as being "a noble encyclopaedia of the history of ideas" in which "lucid and authoritative" modern critics introduce us to the best of what has been thought and written. Oxford seems to have dropped a brick on this one. Lucid? Here are some passages which may help the reader decide:

> The public duty of the playwright was to bring the caviare of his angelic intellectual exercise within the grasp of those savage hordes. . . .
>
> The godlike power of the creators of illusory worlds, the irresistible tendency of man to debauchery rather than improvement, the blindness and self-indulgence of intellectuals, has cropped out, as the defrocked hierophant begs our intercession to save his soul.

The language ranges from Victorian prissy to the imitation of—i.e., "the unsynthesized manifold of everyday life"—a kind of Minimalism.

Authoritative? When Greer talks about Desiderius Erasmus, she identifies him as one of the "schoolmen" and explains that they were philosophical antagonists of Shakespeare. The greatest "schoolmen" had been safely dead for more than a century before Erasmus' birth. And by no stretch of the imagination was Erasmus a medieval. When she analyzes the winter song in *Love's Labours Lost*—

> When all aloud the wind doth blow,
> And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
> And birds sit brooding in the snow,
> And Marion's nose looks red and raw,
> When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,

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Then nightly sings the staring
owl,
Tu-whit;
Tu-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel
the pot—

—she jams it into a theory about Elizabethan marriage, converting both Marion and Joan from farm-girls into housewives for whom (there is zero about this in the text) "love has to ripen into friendship and tolerance." I note that standard Shakespearean practice is to identify scullions like Joan only by their first name. "Greasy Joan" is all of this character that there is in the play: She exists *only* in this line. But, for some reason, Greer needed a housewife and an argument that marriage requires mutual toleration.

When she attacks Old Capulet for being married to a woman too young for him, she says that "he has not danced since before his wife was born." In fact, Capulet says to his cousin (Act I, Scene V) that he has not worn a "mask" for some 20 years —which is to say that he has not disguised himself in order to chase women. All he says about "dancing" is that he is now past the right age for it. But, again, it is important for Greer to insist that he is criminally older than the woman he married, and she even does some fancy arithmetic which the text disproves.

Here is Greer's opinion of Iago:

> Iago is still serviceable to us, as an objective correlative of the mindless inventiveness of racist aggression. Iago is still alive and kicking and filling migrants' letterboxes with excrement.

There are some problems here—not least of which is Greer's preceding remark that "it is futile" to pursue the issue of Iago's motivation. As for the passage itself, that is simply critical bad faith. Greer would like to find a passage in Shakespeare that confirms her opinion on racism. So she invents a playwright who has foreseen Teddy Boys and Rockers. But that word "still" —is that what she thinks Iago has been doing in *Othello*?

So far as *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* are concerned, both are hidden commentaries on things that Greer dislikes. They are models of a "sick society." Prospero, for example, is a monster of capitalism who condemns Caliban "to brutish toil and keeps him at it by torturing him with cramps, side-stitches, and bone-aches, in much the same way that those who enslaved the Brazilian Indians forced them to work every day without pay by the use of the bludgeon." I don't get this: Can one *give* cramps and stitches? Is Shakespeare anti-Portuguese? What is the *point* of all this? Possibly, that Caliban is "really" a version of the "labouring poor" of London with whom Shakespeare sympathized. But if that were true, why didn't he say so? Isn't Greer remotely aware that the great divines of 1610 had no fear whatsoever of accusing monarchy and aristocracy of neglecting the poor? That no allegories were needed by *anyone* for a subject weekly exposed in sermons, homilies, and religious warnings? But it is necessary for her to believe in Shakespeare as a secret hater of Western culture—a modern who, like Mark Twain, was stuck among the medievals and who finally, in a code until now secret, has communicated with her.

This comes very close to crank literature. One has to say that the facts of this book give us no confidence in its ideas.

Ronald Berman is author of A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare's Plays.

Harmless Drudgery

***Dictionary of American Conservatism* by Louis Filler, New York: Philosophical Library; $29.95.**

No movement or discipline has fully arrived on the American scene until it has been the subject of a dictionary or encyclopedia. Conservatism has evidently made it, now that Louis Filler has dedicated one of his dictionaries to it. No one with a serious interest in American Conservatism can afford to do without this *Dictionary*. Movement junkies and *Washington Post* editorialists alike will now be able to browse from Abortion to YAF and back again with considerable profit. It is a first of its kind and is sure to go through many editions.

When it does, the publishers will undoubtedly correct the many perplexing oddities that disfigure an otherwise useful reference tool. The sins of omission are as serious as the sins of inclusion. Where are, for example, M.E. Bradford, George Panichas, and John Howard, Ethics and Public Policy and *Reason* magazine? Of living conservatives, Filler is oblivious except for the most obvious celebrities. Instead, he peoples his books with the radicals and progressives to which he has dedicated earlier volumes: John Jay Chapman, Edward Bellamy, and Sinclair Lewis. Even more baffling is his description of Robert Nisbet as "a transitional figure from liberalism to conservatism" or of *Chronicles* as "edited by the late Leopold Tyrmand" —quite a trick even for our inspired founder! Still, for all its many faults, the *Dictionary of American Conservatism* is a good buy and a bright sign of hope for Philosophical Library.

Dakota Days

by Jane Greer

***Those Days: An American Album* by Richard Critchfield, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday; $19.95.**

> It was their ordinariness that made them matter. . . . Individual life was by its very nature a tragedy; it came to an end; for all of us it was going to be a short way to that grave. But the ordinary life of a society was a comedy that just kept going on. What was at the heart of those days?

This is a book I wish I'd written, a love story of the largest and best kind. Like most people, I remember my childhood, that eternal summer, in a glow of happy forgetfulness, simply out of pleasure. Richard Critchfield "remembers," as if he had been there, his parents' lives and society before he was born, and shows why it's *important* to remember and to go back even further

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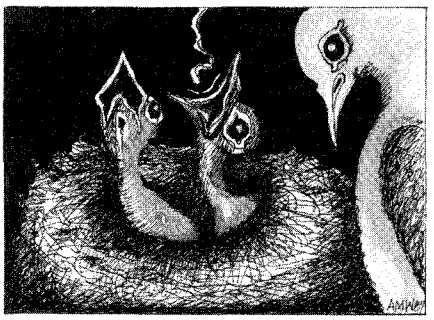
than our own birth: Because like it or not, we are *attached*. We are not historyless like Adam, breathed out of nothing; we're drawn from the narrow end of a real and compelling vortex—*history*—vivid with blood and bone, passion and fear, as it touches down to make us in the here and now. Part of everything that was and will be, we move up the funnel of history to make room for those whose history *we* will be. It was and is all real, all immediate in its time, and Richard Critchfield has the skill and insight to make it *seem* real and immediate.

In simple, exquisitely appropriate language, much of it taken from letters and newspaper accounts and interviews over many years, he introduces his mother, Anne, her family, the Williamses of Iowa, old Quaker stock, and his father's, the less respectable Critchfields of North Dakota. We witness his mother's less-than-perfect wedding day (her father said to her, hours before the ceremony, "I wish you were marrying Forrest [Claxton] instead"). Jim Critchfield, the author's father, brings his new wife to live in Hunter, North Dakota—she would write, "I was to hate wind for the rest of my life"—and they began their family in 1915; the author was the last of five children, born in 1931.

Anne held the home together; Jim stirred things up, made them interesting, committed bigger, heartier sins (that eventually killed him in his 40's), and was just as heartily sorry. A gentle, skilled doctor, and a doctor's son, he spent each day up to his elbows in the real life of the community. Even though this book begins and ends with Anne, it *feels* as if it's about Jim.

Interviewing old-timers who knew his parents, Richard Critchfield lays image upon image in language so inviting that it seems like fiction, and we come to know intimately not only his parents and family but also the entire society and era they inhabited. This is no vague nostalgic trek back to the nonexistent "good old days" or mere homage to a loved mother, but a gifted writer's careful examination of all available resources, to reconstruct the rhythm and immediacy of the past—its sounds and smells, human passions and disappointments. Critchfield has resuscitated those days, given them breath and pulse, and made their



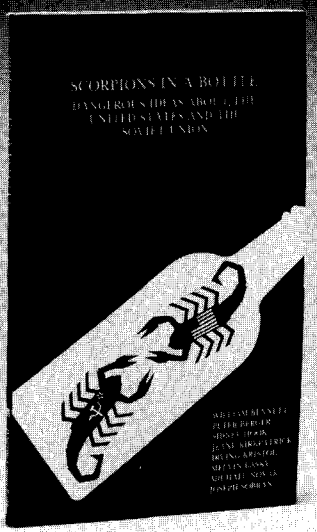
relevance to us, now, evident.

"What was at the heart of those days? Things like the taste of bread right out of the oven when you were good and hungry . . . The way the late, flat sun sent long slants of light across the prairie grass . . . Those times. They'll never come again. But somewhere . . . Somebody was always going to be swinging a golf club or a baseball bat or playing a piano or cracking a joke. Or taking a deep breath and drowsing off to sleep or dreaming or waking up. Or passing from youth to old age, and hardly knowing where all the years went. Time, in the instant, in the irrecoverable passing moment, time continuous and remembered, going on and on . . . I wish I'd known them better."

Dying at the age of 95, nearly half her lifetime lived after the death of the husband she loved even through his long affair with a young girl ("I never wanted to marry her. She was just a girlfriend. You were my wife," he said as he lay dying of alcoholism), Anne Critchfield asked her youngest son, born only a few years before his father's death, to write about their life, about North Dakota and Iowa in those days. Critchfield thought, "What to say? And what if I did as she said? How could I write about Father? I asked her, 'How can I write about somebody I can't remember at all? I mean, say of all the people we know, who is like him?'"

And his mother answered, "You are."

SCORPIONS IN A BOTTLE



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Letter From Switzerland

by Harold O.J. Brown

The German Swindle

To walk along a narrow ridge or cliff path, German-speakers will tell you, you have to be *schwindelfrei*. The French word *vertige* exists in English (vertigo), but we would be more likely to say "dizziness." The German word is for *vertige* or dizziness *der Schwindel*, but *Schwindel* also can mean what it does in English—swindle. "*Mir schwindelt's*": I am dizzy; but, "*Ich schwindele*": I swindle. Brigitte Sauzay, a young professional translator at international conferences, knows modern Germany as well as she knows German. Most people who have done simultaneous translation—which involves speaking the translation into a microphone as fast as the words in the original language—say that it is a tremendous strain. I did it for a number of years and remember that it produced headaches, and sometimes even *Schwindel*. "False friends"—such as *demander*, which means "ask", not "demand" in French, are bad enough, but when one runs into a succession of words such as *Schwindel*, which may truly mean swindle or treacherously mean vertigo, even the most skillful interpreter may be hard put to render a correct simultaneous translation. Dealing with contemporary Germany, it is hard to tell whether one is getting dizzy, being swindled, or both. In *Le vertige allemand* (Paris: Olivier Organ), Brigitte Sauzay tries to clarify matters a bit.

One of Mme. Sauzay's characteristic comments evokes an earlier remark by Nietzsche: "Germany is a country where a more ancient past and a more imminent future than ours dwell together." The contrast between Germany as the creator of the most sublime culture and the perpetrator of the most sordid crimes has been noted in many variations: The land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms is also the land of Hitler, Himmler, and Goering.

Mme. Sauzay identifies the problem in a new way. After its catastrophic defeat in World War II, Germany—or rather West Germany, the *Bundesrepublik*—engaged in a frenzy of economic expansion wrapped in an orgy of self-reproach. Germans tend to wallow in their own guilt—sometimes voluntarily: Every new season, West Germany's government television networks bring week after week of dramatization of the country's criminal, Nazi past. Schoolchildren have to take as much as a full year of "Holocaust Studies." Officially this is to help Germany "come to terms with its past," but it has become a dead weight on Germany's present and a heavy mortgage on the future—not to mention a psychological disaster for countless schoolchildren. Many Germans seem to take a macabre satisfaction in denouncing Germany's past atrocities. The slogan "Nie wieder!" (Never again!) involves more than repentance, however. It seems to involve a certain claim to moral nobility for the present generation, authenticated by the intensity of the moral atrociousness of the second generation past.

Germany gave us the Protestant Reformation and in a sense dialectical theology. (The most eminent representative of dialectical theology, Karl Barth, was a German-speaking Swiss, but very much a part of the German intellectual world.) Both of these movements emphasize the depravity of man in contrast with the holiness of God, and each of them is subject to a peculiar perversion by which man, having identified himself as depraved and God alone as holy, reevaluates himself as holier still by virtue of his insight in recognizing the "absolute qualitative difference" between God and man. Seeing how evil he is makes him superior to everyone else.

German intellectuals, students, much of the press, and the better-publicized parts of the Protestant Church are caught up in a frenzy of pacifism, environmentalism, and anti-authoritarianism. Reagan may be accepted as the moral equal of Stalin but certainly not of Gorbachev. West Germans live in the shadow of the Berlin Wall (which was a quarter-century old in August 1986) yet as a matter of course excoriate South Africa, Chile, and even the United States as the world's paramount examples of oppressive regimes. One curious paradox is that the very intellectuals who engage in vituperating all authority in the West make excuses for totalitarian absolutism in the East. Because this is so, it might be supposed that much of the German intellectual world is in thrall to Marxism if not to Moscow. This is true, in part, but it is not the entire explanation. German environmentalists—the "Greens"—reacted to the Chernobyl disaster by demanding, among other things, the abolition of West Germany's defense system. So that the Soviets might be able to move in and build similar reactors in West Germany? The logic is perplexing. Are Pershing rockets and Germany's own *Nachrüstung* (catch-up armament) the real threats to peace and freedom? The environmentalistic, pacifistic, antiauthoritarian, moralistically supercilious Greens are a smaller minority in Germany in the mid-80's, no more important than the Nazis were in the early 1930's, and yet in an

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important sense it is they who represent the real spirit of end-century Germany. It is easy to explain this apparent Green hypocrisy as the Bavarian Chancellor Franz Josef Strauss does: "A rose is Green before it is red." Strauss, whose real chance of becoming West German chancellor a few years ago provoked fear and loathing verging on hysteria in all the best German circles, is widely considered a relic of nationalism if not of Nazism. Yet Strauss also makes sweeter deals with the Communistic East than any other West German leader except the former Socialist chancellor, Willy Brandt.

"Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust" (Two souls dwell, alas! within my breast), lamented the greatest German poet, Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). Much has changed since Goethe's days, but that fierce ambivalence has not changed. As Sauzay explains, the most strident German opponents of all authority, of all defense, and of every form of violence exerted for one's own protection, could easily fall into a violent frenzy and possibly outdo Nazism. The American nuclear umbrella is widely acclaimed as the only force that has made 40-odd years of uneasy peace possible for Europe. Sauzay's analysis leads one to suspect that it is only the overwhelming Soviet presence on their borders that inhibits Germans from once again combining phenomenal energy with unpredictable fantasy to produce a product the nature and color of which no one can imagine but the terrible intensity of which would be only too familiar. It makes no sense to predict a revival of Nazism. But it probably would have made no sense, in 1924, to predict its rise in the first place. Let there be no misunderstanding: Neither Mme. Sauzay nor this reviewer predicts a new Nazism. But there is a fear that something could come, idealistic, noble in sentiment, self-righteous and pharisaical in its condemnation of all the evils of lesser and more mongrel nations, that could create another inferno.

The Swiss, on Germany's southern border, and particularly the German-speaking Swiss, who share many of the most typically German virtues and vices, look on the Germans with a mixture of superciliousness and superstitious awe. After all, the Germans followed Hitler, the Swiss did not—in large part thanks to the firmness of their French-speaking General Henri Guisan. The Swiss were far too wise for that. At the same time, all the Swiss—but particularly the German-speakers with their variety of peculiar Allemanic dialects—have placed themselves in a kind of golden mountain ghetto and realize that if the Germans are morally their inferiors, they themselves are cultural parasites on Germany. They buy and borrow culture from everywhere, but they graft it onto Germanic roots. The Swiss have feelings of inferiority to and contempt for the Germans that resemble those of Germans toward the rest of the West, and especially towards the United States. The French, among whom the most brilliantly perceptive analyst to date is Brigitte Sauzay, neither disdain nor venerate their German neighbors: but they wonder, in both senses of the word. The Swiss expect nothing good to come out of Germany; the French expect something astonishing and do not know whether it will be good or evil.

Mme. Sauzay evokes the revival of Lutheranism in postwar Germany and sees it exemplified—although in a secularized form—in Green enthusiasm. The 18th-century Enlightenment was antireligious in France and England but religious in Germany, which created quite a different spiritual climate and quite different spiritual tensions. Mme. Sauzay has correctly observed that even the anti-authoritarian protest movements, which are anti-Christian in so much of the world, are strangely religious in Germany. One omission in her incisive analysis lies in her underestimation of the strength of the *Evangelical* renewal—not political religion, but Christian renewal. This has not yet been discovered by the media, but it is there—as the Evangelical or Fundamentalist renaissance was there in the United States long before the media noticed Jerry Falwell. Evangelicalism in Germany differs from that in the United States in that it consists almost entirely of piety, very little of politics. Mme. Sauzay reminds us that we must expect something big from Germany, although she cannot say what. She warns us that it could suddenly turn nasty—the Green bud could produce a black flower. She is correct to tell us to expect *something*, and also when she says that whatever it is, it will not be what we are looking for. The German top, full of energy, continues to spin, and it can move in almost any direction—right or left, or perhaps even "just right."

Harold O.J. Brown is pastor of the Evangelische Kirchgemeinde in Klosters, Switzerland, and a contributing editor to Chronicles.

Letter From New York

by Richard Kostelanetz

Ask Dr. Grants

How do I get a grant?

You first must get an application. Forget about those grants for which you cannot apply, such as MacArthur Fellowships, which are essentially designed for people already known, which is to say celebrities, or incipient celebrities.

Once you get the application, read its guidelines carefully to make sure you qualify and, if you do, then to organize your presentation. If you don't understand something in the guidelines, call or write the granting agency's administrators, who are required to give advice to applicants. Should you find them unhelpful or discouraging, you can either assume they want to save your time, or suspect that they are trying to lessen the competition, rather than increase it, in order to channel available funds to applicants who are administratively favored. Administrators, it should not be forgotten, are supposed only to administer, not to choose. The selection of winners is the responsibility of either the funding agency's board or an ad hoc panel convened for a particular competition.

Application forms fall into two groups: those for individuals and those for organizations. The former are customarily simple, no more than two pages in length, requiring minimal information: name, birthday, birthplace, current address and telephone

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number, "education," present employment, current income perhaps, as well as a brief professional resume. Individual applications customarily require you to submit a sample of recent work. In competitions for individual grants, the winning amounts are usually fixed in advance, either at a single level (e.g., $20,000 in Literature at the National Endowment for the Arts) or at successive levels ($5,000, $15,000, and sometimes $25,000, as in NEA-Visual Arts now). In nearly all competitions for individual grants, the ratio of applicants to winners is at least 10 to one; 30 to one is not uncommon.

Are there better ways to beat those odds?

You can bet on horses that offer better odds, or, if you are desperate, you can rob a bank. For more modest purposes, you can collect unemployment, which probably does more to support the work of indigent individual artists than all the arts councils combined. (In addition to acknowledging the 20th anniversary of the NEA, artists should honor the 50th anniversary, or whatever, of unemployment benefits.) If you have the taste or talent for bureaucratic paperwork, you would be wise to form a nonprofit organization or become part of one, simply because some petitions for its awards have far lower odds. The trouble is that organizational applications are more complicated, being at least four pages in length and requiring a detailed budget to justify a grant within a particular range. The application to the New York State Council on the Arts is especially complicated; and to compound the busywork (and deplete the applicants' creative spirit even more), NYSCA during the application cycle issues a second set of elaborate forms, many of them with questions already answered on the original. All this complexity looks like an insidious device to favor two groups of people: (1) applicants who were previously successful; (2) the NYSCA administrators who can prejudice panel decisions by revealing minor fault amid the mass of detail.

The more complicated an application form is, the more reason you have for wanting to examine the applications of previous winners; there is, in my experience, no better guide to writing your own. When you examine successful applications, notice carefully what claims are made, how long the accompanying explanations are, and how detailed the budget is. Some agencies are more helpful than others in providing previous applications. At a public agency such as NYSCA, all previous applications, of winners as well as losers, are fortunately kept on file, available for public inspection and even photocopying! The man in charge is Joseph Wells, whose number is 212-614-2904.

Budgeting for organizational grants is a curious business. The NEA, for instance, requires that its grants be "dollar-matched" with funds obtained from elsewhere. What this means in practice is not as it seems (and probably not what was intended). Let's say you are a small literary publisher with nonprofit affiliation, and you calculate that you need $10,000 to typeset and print 1,000 copies of a big novel. (This is cheap. A commercial publisher would require at least $100,000 to do the same job, because of all its overhead.) In order to get that 10 grand from the NEA, the small press must establish an expense budget of at least 20 grand. The organization then figures that if it needs that 10 grand from the NEA for book production, there must be at least 10 grand more in expenses. In a small-press application, this extra 10 grand can legitimately include payments to authors and to the press's editors, administrative fees, secretarial assistance, postage, shipping, etc. Now if by good fortune the $10,000 grant comes through, all these "expenses" must be donated, at least temporarily, until there is income from sources other than the NEA grant. In other words, one must budget at least $10,000 more expenses —at least twice as much than is immediately necessary—in order to get the $10,000 required to print the books.

The principal requirement of successful organization-application-writing is a credible budget, where every particular cost makes sense within the size of the grant and the promised result. If, for instance, it costs a thrifty small publisher roughly $10,000 to typeset and print 1,000 copies of a 500-page novel, no one on a selection panel can object if the application allocates $10,000 for typesetting. If, however, an applicant publisher allocated $20,000 or only $2,000 for a thousand copies of such a long book, some panelist might object that this small-press applicant was either extravagant or naive. (If, by good fortune, the applicant's uncle happens to be a book-printer, it would be better to specify a credible sum [$10,000] as the printing cost and then list any reduction from this norm as his dollar-matching contribution to the nephew.)

On the other side of the ledger, by the terms of dollar-matching, an organization must also posit at least $10,000 income from sources other than the NEA. This other income may include grants from other agencies, sales of books, personal contributions, etc. In some applications (and in only some programs), the organization must budget income of "in-kind contributions," such as the editorial time of its principals, because "in-kind" has always been the laudable convention by which poorer applicants can dollar-match. The trouble is that most people asked to construct an application budget make the mistake of treating the question personally—to make a schedule to which they will indeed hew, as they would hew to a personal budget of monthly expenses. That attitude, let me suggest, would be a mistake, especially in filling out an organizational application to public granting agencies. The first truth to remember is that you must create a coherent, persuasive fiction in which the figures are appropriate to the scale of the project (and the possible size of the grant). It does not matter whether you actually expect $5,000 in immediate sales of books; if your application needs that $5,000 figure in order for income to match the amount requested, then you put down $5,000 sales.

Similarly, your description of what you want to do must create a credible fiction within the funding agency's guidelines. If the funding program requires that the proposed book be written from scratch, forget about all the rough drafts you've been doing for the past decade. If it requires live performance, forget for now about the videotape or record you want to make from it. If documentary writing is required,

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rather than creative work, promise only to do documentaries, even if they might have a dash of poetry. And so on. The truth is that a grant application is not a proposal for reality; it is, as a proposal for a grant, a fiction that must, first of all, succeed within the conventions of grant-getting before it can generate the flow of funds that will, happily, allow the applicant to accommodate that fiction to reality.

A final truth to remember is that all awards should come to you as a surprise. Don't ever expect to be funded; don't ever make job (or marriage or whatever) decisions dependent upon the expectation of a grant, for if you make this mistake, the result can only be disappointment.

Are competitions fair?

In comparison to elections in the U.S., probably not. With respect to other selection procedures in this country, some are more fair than others. The rule to remember is that funding agencies differ from each other, with different mandates, different procedures, different tolerances, and even different secrets, which may not be immediately evident. For instance, while an individual NEA fellowship is simply a cash reward to an artist-applicant, a residency award is something else. For the latter, the selection committee is generally composed of people connected to the hosting institution who are looking not just to reward good work but to select individuals whose company they would enjoy. To win a residency from the DAAD Berliner Kunstlerprogramm, say, is more like being chosen a visiting lecturer at a university or an art museum.

How honest are the funding agencies?

Some are more honest than others. The truest rule is that administrators get away with what they are allowed to get away with. And if they get away with murder, as some do, the principal fault lies first with its trustees ("the Council") and then with the failure of our watchdogs to cry foul. For instance, the major scandal at the NEA now is that the chairman exercises, far more frequently than his predecessors, his power to veto grants previously approved by NEA departmental panels. When I asked the NEA's press office for a list of the chairman's victims, the reply was that the NEA, in contrast to NYSCA, never identified rejected applications. They added that, "In order for vetoing to happen, there must be an error of fact or process." However, the examples known to me had in common the facts that they were liberal do-gooding operations donating literary magazines to prisoners and that both had been previously funded by the NEA. They might not have deserved funding, but political censorship is as unpleasant on the right as on the left.

Everyone involved knows about this scandal but is, in truth, scared to go public about it for fear of the chairman's wrath, which is to say his vetoing grants to them that would otherwise be awarded. (Believe me, as the recent recipient of NEA grants, as well as an applicant for more, I thought twice about revealing this.) When Grace Glueck mentioned this recurring vetoing in the *New York Times* (10 November 1985), she failed to note that it might be considered objectionable. The fear is that, until this abuse of administrative power is exposed as the moral and procedural affront that it is, all grants approved by NEA panels are vulnerable to the chairman's veto. My own feeling is that this makes the NEA chairman, elected by nobody, a cultural czar on the Soviet model and thus makes me wonder why a putative Reaganite should be behaving like an antidemocratic Communist. If the House Un-American Activities Committee still exists, it might question his Bulgarian tastes.

The recurring scandal at NYSCA is another kind of administrative abuse: In presenting applications to panels, administrators are said to lie about applicants they disfavor, in order to prejudice panels against rewarding them. (And it follows that such lying would be unnecessary, if the applicant had no chance at all.) And when NYSCA administrators are caught lying, as they sometimes are, and the evidence of their lying is presented to the so-called Appeals Panel (which is itself a scandal), the initial negative judgment is always sustained. Let me tell a complicated story. A few years ago, a small press connected to me applied for a grant to do a book edited by the photography critic Mr. A.D. Coleman. A visual arts staffer who had a vendetta against Coleman reported to the NYSCA selection panel that Coleman had not fulfilled a grant he received two years before through another organization. In fact, however, not only was this grant just several months old (and thus not yet due to be completed) but also by the time the staffer reported on its status to the panel, her information was at least three months old and the earlier Coleman project was complete, except for the printing. She influenced the panel's negative decision and then its vote by making prejudicial misinformation available to the voters. These lies were reported to me, curiously, by another NYSCA staffer who was, like the panelists, conned into believing them as truth! When the evidence of staff lying was presented to the NYSCA Appeals Panel, we were refused. The lamentable truth is that at many agencies, staff lying (and staff vendettas) is treated as a sort of subsidiary benefit of the job.

How accountable are these cultural funders?

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They must issue thick annual reports itemizing every grant. Nonetheless, even these are not exempt from fakery. In the NYSCA Annual Report of 1976-77, the lump sum allocated for the literature program as a whole (p. 36) was considerably more than the total of the individual grants (on pages 37 & 38), which meant that $110,500 was, as they say, "unaccounted for." When I asked about this discrepancy in NYSCA's own Annual Report, I got a series of baloney letters that indicated only that people of putative responsibility were allowing themselves to be "faked out." As far as I can tell, this public money has permanently disappeared, and there is every reason to believe that other NYSCA Annual Reports are similarly full of gaping loopholes.

Richard Kostelanetz is a New York writer who lectures widely on grants and granting. Address all questions to Dr. Grants.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

Who's Wearing the White Hat?

In the heartland's fiercest modern-day shoot-out—farmers versus lawyers and bankers—it's hard to tell the good guys from the bad.

Charles Niska, farmer and father of eight, is serving two consecutive one-year sentences in the North Dakota State Penitentiary for illegal practice of law and jumping bail.

Niska got into trouble helping his neighbor Richard Schmidt try to outwit two local banks, which had started foreclosure proceedings on Schmidt's 3,500-acre farm and called in a $95,000 promissory note.

Schmidt, on Niska's advice, tried to file "land patents" on his farm, which would exempt it from forfeit for bad debts. No deal. So (also on Niska's advice) he wrote and mailed a letter of complaint, or "constructive notice," to the county register of deeds who had refused to let him file. For this, Schmidt was charged with a Class C felony: "threatening a public servant." The "constructive notice" had said merely that the register of deeds, in refusing to let Schmidt file, was remiss in her duty and liable for civil and criminal actions.

Considered by the law to be a victim of Niska's manipulations, Schmidt copped a plea in return for talking about Niska, the prize the attorney general's office had wanted all along. After Schmidt gave his evidence, Niska was charged with practicing law without a license, given a deferred sentence, put on probation, and ordered to undergo psychiatric testing (his speech rambles, he gets excited a lot, he has funny ideas about the income tax, he likes to talk about liberty and justice for all). Niska refused to be tested; on religious grounds he views psychiatry and psychology as a "devilish perversion," and as a citizen he views the evaluation order as political harassment. When the county state's attorney asked that his probation be revoked, Niska missed his hearing and was charged with jumping bail. Now he's doing time.

Niska and Schmidt are joined by thousands of others across the Midwest in their efforts to foil the foreclosure mechanism, but it seems clear that each of these men is in trouble with the law mainly because he's a royal pain in the neck. Certainly they pose no real threat to the system. Most have attended clandestine meetings at which out-of-state "experts" in "common law" give farmers a shred of hope and teach them, they think, to forestall foreclosure with loopholes and tricks—such as writing "constructive notices" or pleading that the lending agreement has been broken if their land is taken by force. The farmers use these maneuvers enthusiastically, like drowning men handed ping-pong balls. Can you blame a guy for trying?

Yes, says the law establishment. Such "common-law" efforts are feckless, undermine what real help could be given to the farmers, and result in a lot of bureaucratic paper-shuffling that clogs the courts and costs taxpayers money. Besides, they say, Niska and those like him really *are* misrepresenting themselves as lawyers. At least in North Dakota, the law is sufficiently vague that it can, when necessary, be interpreted as meaning that a nonlawyer giving anyone any sort of advice in legal matters can be prosecuted. (I grow faint thinking of the times I've said, "You oughta sue!" to friends who've been wronged at work or in a business transaction.) Niska was a gigantic burr under the saddle of The Law, and he was removed.

As one who once paid my $10 and filled out a simple two-page application for nonprofit incorporation of a four-person literary group (the application was provided by the secretary of state's office), only to be told by a lawyer that the form wasn't valid or nearly detailed enough and that I'd have to pay him or someone like him $500 to do it right, I sympathize with these farmers who resent the power, arrogance, and condescension of the law elite. On the other hand, if I ever really *need* a good attorney, I want to be sure I get one, and not some nut who doesn't know a writ from a hole in the ground. But is it right for the law establishment to set the limits of its own domain? If the actions threatened in a "constructive notice"—lawsuits, being reported to a higher authority, etc.—are legal and possible, how can the filer be charged for filing? And if they aren't possible, why worry about it?

Niska's story brings other questions to mind. When a letter of complaint such as the one Richard Schmidt sent to the register of deeds is considered "threatening" and outlawed, only outlaws will have the courage to communicate displeasure to their elected officials. What then happens to government by representation?

And who among us hasn't run into dead-earnest social workers and psychologists who are convinced—nay, *taught*—that *no one* is mentally healthy, that mad instability rages in us all, and that it's their job to find it and fix it? Niska's fear of shrinks makes perfect sense to me.

Regarding the farmers' plight, there's a good case for saying to them, "You borrowed too much too fast and got in trouble. Now take your licks like the rest of us have to." For their part, though, these farmers claim that they were enticed into the situation by the banks back in the 70's when there was plenty of easy money. The more radical among them claim it was a long-standing *plot* by the banks to get their land, but all of them say, in their own

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way, "Sure, we were fools, but *it was offered to us and we took it.*" How many of us would have refused?

Charles Niska could have gone to the State Farm but is imprisoned in isolation at the Pen because, for religious reasons, he refuses medical screening and a tuberculosis test. He misses his family, wrangles about his prison diet, is holding out for his own vitamin supplements, and still hasn't agreed to psychiatric evaluation. And he recently passed up a chance for early release from his term, which expires in May 1988. Asking for parole, he said, would be admitting guilt.

He's filed appeals in his county and at the U.S. District Court and says, "I haven't been to the U.S. Supreme Court, so I'm not done yet. I'll fight them to the end of my life if I have to, and I probably will." This guy obviously has a few chickens loose—but something in me wants him to win.

(Thanks to Frederic Smith of the *Bismarck Tribune* for his two-part feature clarifying the facts of this problem.)

Jane Greer has a clean record in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Old Times There Are Not Forgotten

I'm sure some readers of these letters are tired of hearing what a special place the South is. So I'll warn you: I'm going to say it again. And I'm going to quote all sorts of other people who say it, too. Come back next month if you can't take it.

The South is a *very* special place. For starters, it's special because Southerners like to believe that. In a forthcoming history of the North Carolina School of the Arts, Richard Adler is quoted as follows:

> For the past twenty-five years I've been, on and off, coming into this state, and one thing particularly I've learned: that I've never yet been in a state . . . where there is as much state pride as North Carolinians feel about North Carolina. And this is to me—coming now from two eastern states, New Jersey and New York, where they are pretty blasé about things like this—something to really feel and be a little bit envious of. . . . I wish we had a little bit more of it where we come from.

And well he might. It's a precious resource.

A few years ago, when my colleague Glen Elder and I asked a bunch of Southerners what they liked about their region, most talked about the land. They seemed to agree with William Faulkner, who said once that the South is lucky that God has done so much for it and man so little. A lot of them sounded something like Leroy "Satchel" Paige, who put it this way (in an interview with William Price Fox):

> I tell you something else and you can mark this down as a prediction. You give this country twenty or thirty more years, everybody's got any sense is going down South. Now you take it down there in the Carolinas, and over to Louisiana and then down into Florida. Why, it's like a garden. That's where a man can live. Hell, you want yourself some fish, you just walk out your back door and stick your pole in the river and you got them. That's when they're good—fresh like that. Then say you want yourself some fresh vegetables—I don't mean none of this frozen mess they're throwing at you nowadays. I said fresh vegetables. Like you want yourself some collards—you just go out in the backyard and just reach down and get them. 'Cause they right there. Then say you want some turnips or some rutabeggers with them collards, why you just reach down and scratch around and you get them, too. And maybe

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you got a bean vine whipping around the porch to keep the dogs cool. Why you just reach out and pick them right there.

A good many of the people Glen and I talked to mentioned something else, though, something besides the climate and the soil and the open spaces. They said, one way or another, that they felt *at home* in the South. Woodrow Wilson (no less) said much the same thing, speaking at the University of North Carolina in 1909:

> It is all very well to talk of detachment of view, and of the effort to be national in spirit, but a boy never gets over his boyhood, and never can change those subtle influences which have become a part of him, that were bred in him when he was a child. So I am obliged to say again and again that the only place in the country, the only place in the world, where nothing has to be explained to me is the South. Sometimes after long periods of absence I forget how natural it is to be in the South, and then the moment I come . . . I know again the region to which I naturally belong.

For all the homogenization, massification, and other ugly-ations that have gone on since 1909, Southerners still claim to understand one another better than other Americans. They still don't need to have things explained to them in the South.

In *I'll Take My Stand*, Stark Young wrote of experiences that bring tears to one's eyes because of the memories they evoke of some place. "That place," he wrote, "is your country." For many of us, the South is our country, and we just can't help it.

The South isn't unique in this respect, even among American places. I know New Yorkers and Midwesterners and even Californians who feel something similar about their "countries." But certainly the South has a remarkable grip on many of its children's affections and imaginations.

Some unlikely Southerners have testified to this. Listen to a friend of mine, a self-styled Marxist who teaches at Atlanta University. Returning last August after a summer in California, he wrote me from El Paso: "Frankly I'm ready for home, i.e., the South —with all of its [illegible] which I bitch about but always return to." (I really can't figure out what the garbled word is; it seems to me he bitches about nearly everything.)

I remember well a New Year's party in London, 1978. We bought Jim Beam at $15 a bottle, tracked down greens and field peas in the West Indian market, and made do with some good English ham. Somebody's mother sent Kentucky pecans for the pie. A half-dozen Tennesseans and North Carolinians and a few bewildered Londoners drank, I recall, "To the liberation of our country." Fred Powledge, in his fine book *Journeys Through the South*, tells about the similar party he has every year in Brooklyn Heights; I wish I'd known him when I lived in New York.

I'm going to tell a story that I've never told before—maybe shouldn't tell now, but what the hell. Fifteen years ago, I wrote a book called *The Enduring South*. It argued that there were still many cultural differences between the South and the rest of the United States. A couple of years after that, I was at a sociological convention, coming down on a crowded hotel elevator, when one of the other passengers read my name-tag aloud, and exclaimed "Why, you wrote *The Enduring South*!" When I allowed that I had, the man told me (and the rest of the elevator) that he had read the book while teaching in California, had asked himself "What am I doing here?"—and had thrown over his job to go back home to Louisiana, to teach in a small college there.

This was heady stuff for an assistant professor. Indeed, I believe it's rare for a sociologist of any rank to be told that he has changed somebody's life. Of course I was flattered—also somewhat embarrassed, and virtually speechless. In my confusion I didn't get the man's name, and I don't think I've ever seen him again.

For over a decade, I've kept this story to myself. Even now, it seems grossly immodest to tell it—and, besides, I'm not sure anyone will believe it. I find it pretty unbelievable myself. But I've thought about that experience a lot, and the other day it came to me (at last) that the story says less about my book than about the book's subject.

You see, *The Enduring South* didn't move that man. It's good journeyman work, not bad for a graduate student (which I was when I wrote it). But it's not really evocative; indeed, it's mostly statistical tables. That man wasn't moved by the book, but by what he brought to it: his love for the South, for his country, for the place where nothing has to be explained to him. The book only triggered a process of recollection. A plate of grits might have done the same.

James Dickey said once that he's more proud of being a Southerner than of being an American. I don't know how many would go that far, but a lot of us are just as glad that Southerners haven't had to choose between those loyalties since 1865.

John Shelton Reed's The Enduring South *has recently been reissued by the University of North Carolina Press, with a new afterword by the author.*

Letter From London

by Andrei Navrozov

Is Old Bob McNamara Still Teaching at Harvard?

I had the distinct feeling I had seen the book somewhere before. It was almost like the old cinematographic cliché: close-up of the Treblinka torturer's face in a dream sequence, a faded photograph shot in sepia tones, men running through the courtyard. The title was respectable enough, *The Faber Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. Faber and Faber, 3 Queen Square, don't you know? Eliot's firm. But then I recognized the name: Helen Vendler.

A feverish leafing-through and I was enveloped in familiar drivel:

> Poetry is the most speaking of written signs; it is the most designed of spoken utterances; it inhabits, and makes us travellers in, a place where every phrase of the spoken language would be as outlined as an urn.

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What urn?! "Professor Vendler," William Scammell lashed out in *The Spectator*, "writes in that brow-furrowing pomp-speak beloved of certain academics, which ought rightly to be set up in gothic type." For Vendler, wrote Scammell, seeing is "optic concentration"; line endings are a "perpetual self-hating" in which she finds "the ground" for poetry's "peculiar attraction" and a "spooling, a form of repetition, the reinscribing of a groove"; to read is to join "the procession of forms that give access to an imagined plane of projected existence." *The Faber Book of Contemporary American Poetry* is nothing but *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry* under another name, and the British reader was smelling a rat.

In her introduction to this anthology, Professor Vendler dwells on the contrast between British and American poetry, reminding Britons that her homeland was once "an enormous wilderness only recently settled, educationally and ethnically diverse," with a poetry that was "bound to be diffuse, heterogeneous." Is this merely an innocent truism?

I found some U.S. Census figures for the sample year 1900. Twelve million (or roughly 16 percent) of a total population of 76,300,000 were "foreign-born." One may wonder whether this admixture made that much of a difference in a country whose culture was dominated by a native elite. But let us assume that such a measure of cultural diversity is significant.

Of a total of 23 living poets anthologized by Professor Vendler, 17 (or roughly 74 percent) are professors at American colleges and universities. Outlined as an urn indeed! May not one assume that this measure of cultural *uniformity* is just as significant? In fact, is it not astonishing that an editor so visibly preoccupied with "diversity" should be so blatant, so cliquish in her choices? Whatever America is or may have been, Professor Vendler's vision of American poetry is about as "diffuse" as an IQ test and as "heterogeneous" as a KKK picnic.

The history of misidentification of poetic practice with academic routine began in the U.S. with the publication, in 1938, of *Understanding Poetry* by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (still in print after four editions), although Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry* (now in its seventh edition) had toyed with the enchanting notion as early as 1919. Adopted as standard texts at colleges and universities, these books shaped the American intellectual's perception of poetry as a subject of academic analysis for generations. When Untermeyer's anthology first appeared, a bitter Basil Bunting spoke prophetically of the coming of "the age of poetry for commentators." More recently, the academic canon was updated with Donald Allen's *New American Poetry 1945-1960*.

Thus Professor Vendler's anthology is not a haphazard event but the latest of many steps toward an Ivy League orthodoxy of poetic expression and critical discussion in what Peter Quartermain has called "the history of the politics of poetry" in America. This latest endeavor ought to have been called *The Conformist's Book of Contemporary Academic Verse* (from the commercial point of view, however, *How to Get Tenure: The New American Poet's Guide* might have been more feasible). Accordingly, Professor Vendler's introductory article contains every critical platitude an aspiring academic poet needs to butter up his colleagues up and down the hierarchy.

Consider "poets who are women" ("women poets," one presumes, is a term reserved nowadays for the more rabid kinds of poetess and just isn't *comme il faut* at Harvard). In the old days, Professor Vendler laments, their poetry "was limited both in subject (love, God, children, death) and in expression." But today, she exults, "art, race relations, cultural mythology, metaphysics . . . are now available subjects for any younger woman."

Quite apart from running a risk of being brought before a university disciplinary committee on charges of age discrimination, Professor Vendler is unashamed in her belief that, as a poet, Rita Dove is more free to discuss anything, including "art," in 1980 than Emily Dickinson was in 1880. The truly remarkable thing, however, is the editor's deliberate exclusion of women whose achievement is at least as great as, say, that of Elizabeth

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Bishop (d. 1979)—say, Djuna Barnes (d. 1982), Babette Deutsch (d. 1982), or Laura Riding (living)—because they are outside the academic poet's purview.

As for—what shall I call them?—poets who are men, Anthony Hecht (in my opinion, one of the two or three "big names" of contemporary American poetry bound to endure) is missing. And—if "diversity" of every kind is so important—where is Joseph Brodsky? No Richard Eberhart. No Fred Chappell. No X.J. Kennedy.

"The poets included here," Professor Vendler warns, write "from/*sic!*/a Freudian culture, one in which a vaguely Freudian model of the soul has replaced an older Christianized Hellenic model." You'd think even a car salesman would be more subtle, but this lady, with the combined cultural power of America's academic establishment behind her, pitches Freud the old Detroit way: "The model of the soul you can't afford to miss!" The Bob McNamara of American literary criticism is launching the Edsel of poetry anthologies. The Vietnam War of ideas is just around the bend.

Over here, people prefer bicycles.

Andrei Navrozov is poetry editor of Chronicles.

VITAL SIGNS

SCREEN

Outside the Law

by Sam Karnick

"This is a wonderful country, my boy, but our legal system doesn't work the way it's supposed to."

—Harold Smith, in *Remo Williams, The Adventure Begins*

America's "major" film critics have been very busy—and very worried—lately. They have a lot to worry about; the movies just aren't going their way anymore, which ought to make the rest of us very happy.

Of course, the greatest critical *bête noire* of the decade has been Johnny Rambo, Sylvester Stallone's forthright, inarticulate Vietnam vet whose escapades, the critics fear, will soon so distort the values of America's young as to get us embroiled in "another Vietnam." Interestingly, these are the same folks—Pauline Kael, Roger Ebert, Stanley Kauffmann, and Rex Reed—who argue that pornography doesn't contribute to crime. We have cause to wonder why they hope to exempt movie violence from the protection of their beloved First Amendment. Different tastes?

Certainly Stallone, with his astonishing box-office power, has borne the brunt of the critical hatred unleashed on recent crime-genre films, but other actors, directors, and writers have come in for their fair share of abuse as well. The honor roll includes actors Clint Eastwood, Charles Bronson, Chuck Norris, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mel Gibson, and Harrison Ford; writers and directors John Milius (*Magnum Force, Red Dawn*), Donald Siegel (*Dirty Harry*), Michael Cimino (*Magnum Force, The Year of the Dragon*), Lewis Teague (*Fighting Back*), Ted Kotcheff (*First Blood, Uncommon Valor*), and Clint Eastwood; and producers such as Dino de Laurentiis, George Lucas, Cubby Broccoli (the James Bond series), Eastwood, and Milius.

It's true that recent crime-genre films are more explicitly violent than their predecessors, but it is the films' tremendous popularity which really annoys the American clerisy. Critics such as Kael *et al.* have offered many theories as to why these films are so popular, but they all boil down to a few simple ideas about how dull-witted contemporary audiences are and how vulgar and meretricious many filmmakers are. These critics have wisely concentrated on the issues of violence and misogyny, as this allows them to sidestep issues such as aesthetic quality, audience response, and sobriety of intent which would otherwise do considerable damage to their arguments.

They often take special pains, in fact, not to say outright that a particular film is "bad," apparently in an attempt to save credibility with the public. Since it would be foolish, for example, to say that George Miller's *The Road Warrior* is a bad film, Pauline Kael dismisses it by calling it "stupid" and goes on to insult the film's audience: "*The Road Warrior* is for boys who want to go around slugging each other on the shoulders and for men who wish that John Wayne were alive and fifty again," a "criticism" which works only because *New Yorker* readers would rather die than be called a John Wayne fan. Likewise, on *Sneak Previews* Jeffrey Lyons and Neal Gabler pretended to be quite undisturbed by the politics of *Red Dawn* but condemned it for being boring, one thing which it is most certainly not.

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Then there's the name-calling: Clint Eastwood is a "fascist," Milius a warmonger, Stallone a stupid egomaniac, Roger Moore "ludicrous," etc. Stanley Kauffmann calls Charles Bronson's *Mr. Majestyk* "ridiculous" and *Death Wish* "insidious." John Simon falls into line and refers to John Milius as "this unsavory character." *American Film* runs a piece on Rambo films and entitles it "The Fascist Guns in the West." Pauline Kael, as usual, tops them all in rancor, if not coherence, in saying of Paul Schrader, scenarist of *Taxi Driver* and writer-director of *Hardcore*, "For Schrader to call himself a whore would be vanity: he doesn't know how to turn a trick."

These critics have been so virulent and irrational in their condemnation of recent crime films that their motives seem suspect. Why all the fuss? If young people want to watch good guys make a hash out of bad guys, well, that doesn't seem to be much of a threat to American society. But Kael writes as if it were. Still, I believe they're sincere. I also believe they are dead wrong about these films.

First and foremost, they are wrong about the motives of the people who make these films. They are not making these films because they're greedy or bellicose or sexually repressed or stupid, all things of which these filmmakers have been frequently accused. These films are being made by artists from all across the political spectrum. In fact, many of the people involved in these productions have also made some of the most critically acclaimed films of our time. Such critical favorites as William Friedkin, Peter Weir, Alan Rudolph, Nick Nolte, William Hurt, Sigourney Weaver, Mickey Rourke, and Genevieve Bujold have all been involved in the making of recent crime-dramas.

As for those filmmakers most closely associated with the genre, Eastwood, for example, makes as much money on his goofy comedies as he does from his "Dirty Harry" films; Norris, Schwarzenegger, and Ford have all expressed interest in making comedies and love stories. Neither money nor ideology is the main reason these films are being made. They're making these films because they *like the subject.* Impossible to believe, perhaps, especially for rich New Yorkers who travel to work in limousines, but there are people out there who actually like to make films about crime. The reason is clear: They're interested in morals.

For that is what crime films are about: morals. They are not about guns, "macho" posturing, crass self-aggrandizement, or any of the other phantasms pursued by phony critics as easy targets for derision. They are about questions of right and wrong. Most citizens have at least a rough idea of what's legal and what's illegal; what is harder to determine in any given situation is what's right and what's wrong. That's why these films go outside the law: because that's where the ambiguity is, where the answers are unclear, and where one can question society's basic values. That's where the hard choices are: outside the law.

Lazy critics have lumped these films into a category usually called "gun films," "revenge films," "vigilante films," or even "fascist films." I don't think these films constitute a *genre* in the literary sense, because they cut across several genres, making definition difficult. However, although the term is usually used derisively, I will cheerfully consent to calling these pictures "vigilante films," because that is precisely what they are. What is a vigilante, after all, except a man who bands together with his friends and neighbors to restore order, especially when the law has broken down? In the "vigilante film," people are pushed outside the law because society fails to provide protection from criminal forces or fails to provide retribution for one or more heinous criminal acts.

That word "heinous" is important. Vigilante films don't concern themselves with shoplifting or burglary or purse-snatching or even muggings. The central concern is with wanton murders, serial killings, rapes, drug dealing, armed robbery, organized crime, terrorist acts, and other horrific dangers to the civil peace.

These things happen, remember, and in our country they often go unpunished, for one reason or another. Vigilante films, at their worst, pander to the impotent audience member's desire to see a rude form of justice done. This desire, however, could as well be fulfilled by characters who stay inside the law: i.e., the police, operating by the book. Contemporary audiences, on the other hand, don't respond so well to characters who stay within the law, and filmmakers don't seem to have much interest in straightforward, by-the-book cops. Indeed, vigilante films often ridicule the bureaucratic-minded, square-toed cop who is more concerned with procedure than justice. No, it's clear that audiences and filmmakers want to see their heroes go outside the law. The question is why.

The answer to that question is more complicated than Kael and her colleagues let on. The vigilante film is a fairly recent development. Hollywood's "cop films" and "gangster films" of the 1930's often inadvertently glorified their criminal lead characters by portraying them as romantic rebels against society. Audiences sympathized with the gangsters played by Jimmy Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and Clark Gable in such films as *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), *Little Caesar* (1930), and *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934); they were little guys from the slums making it big the only way they knew how.

When these same actors played cops, however, they lacked audience sympathy. The cop has society behind him; while there is danger in his life, there just doesn't seem to be the same challenge and romance as there is in the life of a gangster. The gangster's life is tougher, freer, and more romantic—the gangster gets the pretty girls.

This remained a problem for crime films for over three decades. Then, with the loosening of Hollywood's Production Code in the 60's, along with the heady combination of freedom and nihilism characteristic of American elite culture during the latter part of that decade, Hollywood produced a spate of films *explicitly* glorifying criminals and extenuating or even excusing their behavior. Many filmmakers—and most critics—saw American society as too corrupt to have any right to criticize the romantic rebels played by Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Warren Beatty, and Faye Dunaway in this group of films released near the end of the decade. Audiences were treated to films like *Bonnie and Clyde,* which mourned the deaths of a pair of psychotic, murderous, armed robbers; and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance*

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Kid, a film which was so utterly corrupt and cynical as to present a pair of vicious highwaymen as just a couple of happy-go-lucky pranksters out for a good time.

What is even more surprising is the way the critics of the time fawned over this trash. Pauline Kael called *Bonnie and Clyde* "the most excitingly American American movie since *The Manchurian Candidate*." In fact, Kael was so stunned that she couldn't understand how anybody could dislike it: "To ask why people react so angrily to the best movies [*i.e.*, ones Kael likes] and have so little negative reaction to poor ones [ones Kael dislikes] is to imply that [*Bonnie and Clyde*'s detractors] are so unused to the experience of art in movies that they fight it." She explicitly sympathized with the lead characters: "[S]ome part of us wants to believe in the tiny possibility that they can get away with it. Is that really so terrible?"

In a similar vein, John Simon wrote that *Cool Hand Luke* "may have been the best American film of 1967," and in a generally unfavorable review of *Easy Rider*, wrote, "I would willingly sympathize with these kids if their case were better argued." Judith Christ called *Bonnie and Clyde* "superb" and noted appreciatively that the film was not just "another bit of lip service to morality." These, mind you, are the same people now decrying the violence of the vigilante films.

Audiences, for their part, flocked to these hateful, nihilistic films, and critics and fellow filmmakers showered them with awards. What the critics of the time failed to understand, however, was that a spate of such cynical fare was bound to produce some sort of backlash. And indeed it did, a backlash in fact far more extensive and popular than the group of films to which it was a reaction.

Peter Yates's *Bullitt* (1968), starring Steve McQueen, took some tentative steps toward vigilantism, but the genre really begins, for all practical purposes, in 1971, with the release of *Dirty Harry*, starring Clint Eastwood. By now, just about everybody has seen or heard of *Dirty Harry*, in which Eastwood plays rogue cop Harry Callahan, out to get justice whether society wants it or not.

Directed by Donald Siegel with uncredited screenplay rewrites by John Milius, *Dirty Harry* solved the problem that had plagued crime films since their inception: it found a way to make the cop the True hero by presenting the *cop* as the rebel against the system. This was truly a revolutionary idea. Harry Callahan is continually plagued not only by criminals but also by his weak-kneed superiors within the department. His courageous, principled rebellion against the bureaucrats in the San Francisco Police Department made him an instant hero with American moviegoers, especially college-age males.

Dirty Harry presented almost all of the vigilante film's characteristic elements in their first complete incarnation. Clint Eastwood, as Harry Callahan, portrays a man obsessed with a particular criminal, a serial-murderer called the Scorpio Killer, played by Andy Robinson. There is the hero's attachment to his gun, in this case Harry's famous .44 Magnum. There are the scenes where the killer taunts the police with their inability to catch and hold him. There are the cowardly, by-the-books superiors in the SFPD, effectively exemplified by Lieutenant Bressler (Harry Guardino), Harry's boss. There is the fact that the killer is apprehended by the hero but released on a legal technicality. There are the violence, vertiginous pace, and gritty visual details now inevitable in films of this type.

And most memorable—and controversial—is the stunning confrontation at the end between cop and criminal. While the Scorpio Killer, wounded, lies on the ground, his hand only inches from a gun, Harry points his sidearm at the killer and dares him to try to pick up the other gun. Harry:

> Uh-uh. I know what you're thinking, punk. You're thinking, did he fire six shots or only five? Now, to tell you the truth, I've forgotten myself in all this excitement. But being as this is a .44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world, and will blow your head clean off, you've got to ask yourself a question: "Do I feel lucky?" Well, do you, punk?

Dirty Harry was a seminal film, a turning point for the crime-film genre, and, incidentally, a box-office blockbuster. Critics, on the other hand, hated the film. Kael, for example, called it "greedy, opportunistic, fascist" and "a remarkably single-minded attack on liberal values, with each prejudicial detail in place." She saw the film's ideas as not only wrong but downright indecent and dangerous:

> *Dirty Harry* is obviously just a genre movie, but this action genre has always had a fascist potential, and it has finally surfaced. If crime were caused by super-evil dragons, there would be no Miranda, no Escobedo; we could all be licensed to kill, like Dirty Harry. But since crime is caused by deprivation, misery, psychopathology, and social injustice, *Dirty Harry* is a deeply immoral movie.

Dirty Harry, for all its success at the box office, did not inspire a large number of imitators. Eastwood produced a sequel, *Magnum Force*, in 1973, but few other filmmakers seemed to have much interest in following his lead. *The French Connection* was also released in 1971, but although Gene Hackman's Popeye Doyle is a likable and hard-nosed hero, the film doesn't really get into vigilantism very deeply. *Walking Tall* (1973), directed by action-film veteran Phil Karlson, was one of the few that did.

Then, in 1974, came *Death Wish*, a harrowing revenge fantasy starring Charles Bronson and directed by Michael Winner. Bronson plays Paul Kersey, a mild-mannered, politically liberal engineer who lives in New York City. His wife and daughter are savagely raped, and his wife dies as a result. Bronson then takes to the streets and makes a hobby of inviting attack by appearing vulnerable, then turning on his attackers and killing them. Critics were appalled, but *Death Wish* was a popular hit.

Again, however, there were few imitators. Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) and Eastwood's *Magnum Force* (written by John Milius and Michael Cimino) contributed an important element of this type of film by tracing much of the corruption to the police

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force itself. And in 1976, Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* pushed the vigilante film's possibilities for violence even further with its story of Travis Bickle, a lonely Vietnam vet living on sugar, scotch, and cereal, who decides to clean up some of the "scum" infesting New York City. By the late 70's, however, the vigilante film seemed to have died a natural, if perhaps premature, death, except for the occasional Eastwood or Bronson release.

That all changed with the arrival of Stallone, Schwarzenegger, and Chuck Norris. Suddenly, vigilante films sprang up in surprising profusion, resulting in the critical hatred described above. But are these films as bad as all that? Aesthetically, they range from the classic *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish* to such frankly low-brow stuff as *Class of 1984* and *Cobra*. They range in tone from the bleak despair of *The Year of the Dragon* and *The Road Warrior* to the sober intellectuality of *Trouble in Mind* and *Sudden Impact* to the raucous comedy of *Ghostbusters*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, and the "Police Academy" series. Aesthetic quality and film style seem to have little to do with the criticism.

Kael *et al.* hate these films, but they've never been able to say exactly what it is they dislike about them that isn't also in numerous films they like. Instead of reexamining their reactions to the films, these critics have taken a scattershot approach, finding something to dislike in every film in the genre, while keeping up the pretense of judging each film separately. Their criticisms, however, have inevitably ended up hammering at the same points over and over. Misogyny or antifeminism is among the most frequent charges despite the aggressive behavior of Rae Dawn Chong in *Commando* or Sondra Locke in *Sudden Impact*; and in *Tightrope*, *Trouble in Mind*, *Witness*, and many other vigilante films the women prove to be strong, independent, and intelligent, if less bellicose than some of their male counterparts. Furthermore, James Cameron's two films as director and co-scenarist, *The Terminator* and *Aliens*, clearly put the lie to this caricature of the genre. In both films the female lead is shown to be a strong and effective defender of herself and those dear to her precisely *because* of her femininity.

Another tactic many critics have used to defame the vigilante film is to link it to the one genre that is even lower in their estimation, the "slasher" film of the *Halloween-Friday the 13th* variety. Interestingly, critics have somehow missed the one true similarity between the two genres: the fact that the slasher films deal with the same fears of violence and anarchy the vigilante films do, only pitched toward a teenage audience. Certainly such staples of the slasher genre as murderers wearing hockey masks and using power tools to kill or maim their victims reflect middle- and upper-class teens' fears of proletarian violence. Most critics, however, merely avert their eyes and accuse the filmmakers of glorifying violence, just as they do with vigilante films.

Vigilante films most decidedly do not glorify violence. In fact, they take great pains to show the high cost of living outside the law, even for those who do so only in the pursuit of justice. Their heroes are sometimes killed at the end—as in *To Live and Die in L.A.*, *Uncommon Valor*, and *Red Dawn*—and friends, partners, or family members are often injured, raped, or killed in these films. Often the hero himself is ironically the victim of other vigilantes, as in *Dirty Harry*, when Harry gets beaten up by a neighborhood watch group which mistakes him for a Peeping Tom.

The heroes of many of these films suffer from serious injuries or physical disabilities. Knee injuries are particularly popular: Max Rockatansky (Mel Gibson) of the *Mad Max* series walks with a decided limp, as do Hawk (Kris Kristofferson) in *Trouble in Mind* and Daniel (Ralph Macchio) in the final scene of *The Karate Kid*. Head injuries (Max again) and gunshot wounds (John Book in *Witness*, Harry Callahan in *Dirty Harry*) are also common. For a genre that supposedly presents the hero as indestructible superman, the protagonists of these films do a surprising amount of limping and scuttling on the way to their final confrontations.

Furthermore, these physical injuries are only the outward reflections of the more serious psychic disabilities suffered by most vigilante heroes. The cost of going outside the law is evident in the abysmal home lives of many vigilante heroes: There are troubles with wives in many films (e.g., *48 Hrs.*, *Raw Deal*), trouble with children (e.g., *Tank*, TV's *The Equalizer*), and unmarried, widowed, or divorced loneliness (Johnny Rambo, Harry Callahan, John Book). In some films, the hero suffers even worse torment as his wife is murdered by his adversary: Max's wife is killed at the end of *Mad Max*, Paul Kersey's wife is killed in *Death Wish*, and the ex-wife of Stanley White (Mickey Rourke) is killed in *The Year of the Dragon*.

To say, then, that these films glorify violence or that they fail to show the negative consequences of violence is patently false. Furthermore, these same critics have no qualms about the comparable levels of violence in films of which they approve: e.g., Kurosawa's *Ran*, Coppola's *Godfather* films, the aforementioned *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Butch Cassidy*, and films by Kael's beloved Brian de Palma. It all depends on whose ox is being gored.

The heroes of vigilante films are never cold-blooded killers who like to kill for the fun of it, although their adversaries often are. The heroes usually have to be pushed into going outside the law. Matrix (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *Commando* has to go outside the law when terrorists kidnap his daughter. Bronson, as noted earlier, begins his vigilante action in *Death Wish* after his wife is killed. Josey Wales begins his quest in *The Outlaw Josey Wales* after his wife and son are killed. John D'Angelo (Tom Skerritt) organizes a vigilance committee to protect his Philadelphia neighborhood in *Fighting Back* after robbers beat his mother and amputate her finger in order to steal her wedding ring.

Numerous films of this type have treated the theme of violence as a threat to the family unit. The heroes are frequently called into action because of threats to children. Matrix's adversary in *Commando*, for example, is quite clearly a homosexual who hates him for, among other things, being able to fit into society and raise a child; significantly, the story begins when he kidnaps Matrix's daughter. The Scorpio Killer shoots a young boy, holds another hostage, and kidnaps a school bus full of children in

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Dirty Harry. Jake Van Dorn (George C. Scott) swings into action in *Hardcore* when he sees his runaway daughter in a pornographic film and resolves to find her and bring her home. Far from being nihilistic or antisocial, the cumulative effect of vigilante films since *Dirty Harry* has been to strengthen respect for the family as the organizing force of society. Their heroes are not steely-eyed at home, only in the streets.

Far from painting a "black-and-white, heroes-and-villains" picture of society, these films seldom fail to point out the similarities between the vigilante and his adversaries. In the first place, both operate outside the law. But filmmakers use other ways as well, often quite consciously.

The writers of *Dirty Harry*, for example, were very careful to point out the similarities between Harry and the Scorpio Killer. Both are unmarried (Harry widowed), each resorts to subterfuge in order to entrap the other, each stalks his victim(s) methodically and emotionlessly, and each spends a considerable amount of time on rooftops or high floors of buildings. The implied comparison is taken to an extreme in Eastwood's one critically acclaimed crime movie, *Tightrope*.

Leftist critics have accused all these movies of being right wing, but the amount of overt political content in these films is actually pretty small; selective quotation by disingenuous critics make them seem far more polemical than they really are. Furthermore, most of these same critics have shown a corresponding streak of "anti-conservatism," as in the following by Pauline Kael, in her review of Peter Yates's *Eyewitness* (screenplay by Steven Tesich): "Still, about midway, I thought, I wish Tesich would get over his love affair with America, or at least stop trying to authenticate the American dream." As if that weren't blatant enough, Robin Wood recently called *Star Wars* and *Rocky* "precisely the kind of entertainment that a potentially fascist culture would be expected to produce and enjoy."

In point of fact, vigilante films go to great lengths to establish liberal credentials by showing the deleterious effects of vigilantism on the hero, his family, and society. Clearly their creators don't advocate that audiences go outside the law to seek justice; they merely want fairer and more rigorous enforcement of the laws that are already on the books. Far from "propagandiz[ing] for para-legal police power and vigilante justice," as Kael said of *Dirty Harry*, vigilante films are not calls to action, they are laments. There is always a sting of sadness in the ending of a vigilante film, as the injured but indomitable hero goes back to a broken home to await the next outrage against society. These films lament the moral dissolution their makers see in the society around them. They lament the slaughter of America's children in the schools and on the streets. They lament the fear and anger in which ordinary people spend their lives due to rampant street crime. They lament the interference of nitpicking civil libertarians who block effective law enforcement. And they lament, above all, the dissolution of family, neighborhood, and community ties which help make crime so prevalent and difficult to stop.

If vigilante films and their filmmakers sometimes seem angry, perhaps they have a right to be, even if that right happens to be one of the few not sanctioned by the American pseudointelligentsia. In this opinion, the filmmakers are clearly in sync with the feelings of their audience. Michael Winner, director of *Death Wish*, has said:

> The picture was a release; it showed somebody doing what everybody else is too afraid to do themselves. Don't tell me that if there was an item in tomorrow's paper about a man whose wife and daughter had been raped and killed, and who went out and shot the attackers, the whole country wouldn't be delighted. I would too; and all the liberals who write this ass-hole nonsense about what a fascist picture *Death Wish* was, I believe they would as well.

The box-office grosses of these often poorly made films and the reaction to the Bernhard Goetz incident attest to the accuracy of Winner's comment.

Relevant as they are to the times, these films are telling a story that is by no means new. Vigilante stories have a long history, from Robin Hood and the Scarlet Pimpernel through the filmic exploits of the Lone Ranger and Zorro and the comic-book adventures of Batman, Superman, Spiderman, and the like. Much of the most popular American detective fiction has featured vigilantism, in characters such as Sam Spade, Phillip Marlowe, and Lew Archer. Such stories and characters seem to be most popular when social cohesion is weakest. The lawlessness and social chaos of Weimar Germany, for example, provided the context for such films as Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse, Der Spieler* (*Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*) and *M* and Gerhart Lamprecht's *Emil und die Detective* (*Emil and the Detectives*). That vigilante films are so popular now would seem to be considerable cause for concern.

Vigilante films say it in many different ways, but they all say the same thing: The social order in America is in such a mess that there is no assurance of justice to be found by working within the system. This is not the place to discuss the accuracy of that perception, nor its causes. Both sides of the controversy will be happy to trot out the usual suspects. It is, however, important to note that when the public begins to show such a monumental lack of faith in their country's leadership as is implied in these films, that country would seem to have a considerable problem on its hands. And when popular television series such as *Magnum P.I.*, *The Equalizer*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *The A-Team* provide weekly lessons in that message, you'd think even the dullest members of the American *nomenklatura* would take notice and begin to question the direction their fellows have been taking the country for the last 25 years or so. But they haven't, preferring merely to deride these films' massive audiences as stupid, insecure male chauvinists.

Maybe they're right. Maybe American film audiences are stupid, insecure male chauvinists. Maybe filmgoers would be better off watching *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and all the other masterpieces that make the critics' annual "ten-best" lists. Still, that doesn't change anything. If a large number of Americans have lost faith in their society's ability to police itself, that's a pretty big story which we can't afford

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to shrug off. It's easy for the American clerisy to shut their power windows and ignore the commotion outside their limousines. Too bad it's not so easy for the rest of us.

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STAGE

Nil and Void: Beckett's Last Gasp

by David Kaufman

During the ongoing, international celebration of Samuel Beckett's 80th birthday, which commenced last spring, much is being said, written, and done to reiterate unequivocally his position as the preeminent playwright of our century. There is no debate, really, so much as an affirmation and an exploration of his unquestioned significance. The irony, of course, is to be found in the very notion of "celebration"; for nothing could be further from the essence of Beckett's life and work, an oeuvre of nihilism so dreadful and methodically perfect in its devastating portrayal of nothingness that it defies celebration.

"My work," wrote Beckett in a letter to his director Alan Schneider during the early stages of *Endgame* in 1957, "is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin." If Beckett felt above taking any aspirin himself, he also felt there was no possible relief from the dread of the void he insisted on facing. "The major sin is the sin of being born," as Beckett paraphrased Sophocles to the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1964.

Some years ago a dissatisfied Kenneth Tynan summarized Beckett with the statement, "I am bored therefore I am." Recently a more respectful Richard Ellman refined Tynan's allusion when he wrote, "I suffer, therefore I may be," as *his* commentary on Beckett. In their search for a consummate metaphor, both the detractor and the champion independently looked back to no one less than Descartes as a proper predecessor to Beckett. It will take an equivalent few hundred years to know if Beckett's impact will be as influential as it now seems or halfway as profound as Descartes. Some consider it well on its way to being just that. But as literary criticism has discovered, the very notion of influence is suspect—at the very least it must be viewed as moving backwards no less than forwards. Ellman argues that not only can we locate the influence of Wilde, Yeats, and Joyce on Beckett, but that since Beckett we are compelled to reevaluate their work as well.

Beckett has made a pact with the cosmos, which he reveals as being unrevealable, unmalleable, implacable. He has been rewarded handsomely in return, and many a critic has predicted that his cry in the wilderness will be heard as long as there are ears to listen. But—and this is both the grace and the curse of Beckett's vision—as long as that may be, it isn't nearly long enough. According to Beckett's mercilessly grim view, any achievement is at best a whimper, a sigh, a groan. What is humanity, according to Beckett, but mere flatulence released against the grander scheme? The imperfection, the limitation of humanity, is to deduce a scheme where none exists.

"'I suffer, therefore I may be' was his improvement upon Descartes," proclaims Ellmann, who goes on to explain, "as if misery marked but did not confirm existence, and as if thinking were out of the question." For Beckett, the question itself no less than the thought that provokes it are equally artificial and absurd. Only *nothing* has proven sufficient or can hope to be enough. His later writings suggest that even *Waiting for Godot*, his 1952 masterpiece which catapulted him to international fame and which *infected* much that has come since, is for Beckett but a sigh in comparison to the awesome winds of eternity. Although its running time is significantly longer, *Godot* is no more meaningful than his opus, *Breath*, a play lasting 35 seconds. Both are equally meaningless in relation to the void he cannot surmount, the vacuum he has spent a lifetime trying to capture. While many contend that Beckett has succeeded in his obsessive mission to articulate the void, for Beckett success is out of the question, and the void is too terrible to ever be harnessed.

Two years ago there were two separate revivals of Beckett's *Endgame*. One was a straightforward rendering, guaranteed to recapture the flavor or the imprint of the original, since it was directed by Alvin Epstein, who initiated the role of Clov (the servant or fetcher) in the 1958 premiere production and who here assumed the part of Ham (the seated, blind master) in the 1984 version. But it was another production which opened within months of Epstein's that makes for the more interesting historical footnote. As directed by JoAnne Akalaitis for Robert Brustein's American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, this second production took creative license by positioning the four characters in an obsolete subway station. Beckett objected vigorously to reports of Akalaitis' intended production, and the play was finally permitted to open only with the following caveat inserted in the program: "My play requires an empty room and two small windows." (For the record, he also objected to the inclusion of background music—in this case composed by Philip Glass.) Beckett's response was more than a little surprising, considering that the setting for *Endgame* had been represented in the past variously as an infant's playpen, a chicken coop, and a boxing ring, without—as far as I can glean—incurring so hostile a reaction from the playwright. It's also ironic and hypocritical in view of Beckett's reputation as an active advocate of political freedom, a reputation based on his involvement with the French Resistance Movement during the war and, more to the point, his boycotting the production of *any* of his plays in his native Ireland in protest of the Irish government's interfering with planned productions of works by Joyce and Sean O'Casey at an annual festival of plays in Dublin in the late 50's.

Along with *Godot* and *Endgame*, Beckett's other most famous play is probably *Krapp's Last Tape*, currently revived in New York in what must be viewed as an authorized production, since it has been directed by Beckett himself. *Krapp* is the first postwar work

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written in English following many years of his composing in French, his adopted language. The decision to revert to English was a kind of inspiration. According to Deirdre Bair's biography of Beckett, he was blocked against writing prose at the time (1958) and "plagued" by multiple ailments and illnesses. He conceived of *Krapp* after meeting the Irish actor Patrick Magee, who had previously recorded Beckett's radio play *All That Fall* for the BBC. As Bair tells it, "Beckett told Magee that he was astonished when he first heard him speak because Magee's voice was the one which he heard inside his mind."

Such circumstances help to account for what was written. Since it traffics in one figure, *Krapp* is quintessential Beckett. For Beckett is the epitome of the solipsist, too busy doubting his own existence to begin to imagine the existence of others. *Krapp's Last Tape* is a breakthrough for Beckett, since it is both a monologue and a drama. If the dramatic interaction is between a character and his previous self, there is interaction nevertheless. Beckett's conception of the tape recorder as a theatrical contrivance ingeniously allowed him the opportunity to retain interaction, without which there can be no drama, while it also adhered to the integrity of his depiction of *man alone*. *Krapp* marks a turning point, after which Beckett will increasingly evoke the sense of the last or the first (i.e., the *only*) person alive.

Krapp is posed as an ailing man who, when we meet him on his 69th birthday, is about to record a fresh tape in his ongoing oral diary. The conflict in the 50-minute play emerges when he gets sidetracked from his mission by listening to "Box three, spool five," or an entry he recorded when he was 39. He locates the desired tape ("The little scoundrel . . . the little rascal"), and we hear along with him his reflections and impressions made when he was 30 years younger, from specific descriptions ("a girl in a shabby green coat on a railway-station platform") to general musings ("the things worth having when all the dust . . . when all my dust has settled"). Krapp the elder is noticeably impatient with his younger, more hopeful and vital self. When he isn't demeaning himself (" . . . that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago"), he's interrupting the flow of the tape by stopping the machine and fast-forwarding ahead.

In what amounts to perhaps the most telling conceit in all of Beckett's work, Beckett has Krapp spitefully cut himself short just as he is about to share his most important revelation with himself and with us: "The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle . . . for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was that, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely . . . " At that instant Krapp interrupts the tape, and we're never told what "that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing" consisted of for the younger Krapp.

But the point—that there is no point—made so swiftly yet emphatically here by Beckett, was made time and again since: by Kurt Vonnegut in *The Sirens of Titan*, which reduces the purpose of mankind to conveying a message that "The part is on the way" to some extraterrestrial species that needs to repair its intergallactic spacecraft; by Stanley Kubrick, who dismisses civilization before "2001" in one fell swoop, so to speak, as a prehuman ape hurls a bone into the sky and it becomes an interplanetary ship in what is still for us the future; by Updike, who, in the Foreword to his own *Bech: A Book*, was compelled to say, "Already the contents of a book count as little as the contents of a breakfast cereal box."

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Now that 30 years have elapsed since Beckett penned *Krapp*, we can see that it is his most significant work. Hardly anyone would dare respond today as Kenneth Tynan did in 1958 by writing his review for *The Observer* as a parody of the play itself called "Slamm's Last Knock," complete with ironic props and irreverent stage directions, while depicting the process of his writing a review of the play. On the other hand, I don't know if anyone other than Robert Brustein recognized it then for what it was and remains: " . . . Beckett's latest, and very possibly his best, dramatic poem about the old age of the world."

As a self-contained autobiographical statement, *Krapp* boasts of no loopholes, every loop of the tape and every jump ahead accounted for. *Krapp* presents a man regarding himself who is in turn regarding himself again; and to this apparently enclosed circle must be added Beckett regarding/conceiving the first man, and our regarding the entire enterprise. The dilemma, for Beckett, is our propensity to regard at all. He resents our self-appointed mission to wonder, to wander, to ponder, to question, to hope, when all that he finds is despair.

On a more mundane level, *Krapp* is to Beckett what Prufrock was to Eliot: In each of these works the author projected himself into the future looking back (" . . . before embarking on a new retrospect," says Krapp). In keeping with the comparison, the peach Prufrock would only "dare to eat" becomes Krapp's banana just as it had been Estragon's carrot before.

In this latest production of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett the *director* has left nothing to chance—which must be viewed as a typically Beckettesque paradox, since Beckett the writer apparently believes there is nothing beyond the random and the arbitrary. Even a particle of dust floating and noticeable in the flood of a theatrical spotlight seems calculated and preordained within this context. And Rick Cluchey's performance is so studied and affected (whether he's methodically peeling the bananas, shuffling to the rear room to collect his canisters of tape, or *over*reacting to hearing his younger self) that it does a disservice to the script. Only Bud Thorpe, who designed a painterly set and enhanced it with striking lighting, has succeeded here.

Still, *Krapp's Last Tape* may very well be Beckett's last important work. In subsequent years, he has focused his attention on writing prose monologues that have become ever more internalized, wending their way into an interior that knows no bottom as they duplicate with uncanny precision the way one "talks" to oneself when one is thinking. Appropriately, the syntax is chaotic, the vocabulary is limited, the grammar is inelegant, the thoughts are fleeting, fragmentary and only amount to something through rhythm, pattern, and redundancy, the accumulation and index of impulses.

In his discussion of Beckett's *Happy Days* in 1961 (or *26 years ago*), Richard Gilman wrote: "The miracle lies in the fact that here every element that has been thought to be necessary to the theatre's conquest of life—plot, character, movement, linear revelation, the resolution of struggle—has dwindled to a set of notations and gestures, if anything at all remains; and yet life continues to rise from Beckett's stage as it does from few others."

Some of the more recent attempts to render Beckett's recent monologues on stage, albeit monologues that were designed for the written page, have not proved as resurrectable. Nearly four years ago, Mabou Mines-member Frederick Neumann delivered a staged reading of Beckett's prose monologue *Company*, which was an exercise in tedium and inadvertently *symptomatic* of the pointlessness that is Beckett's point. Now, and to much more winning effect, Neumann is back with a staged version of Beckett's 1983 opus, *Worstward Ho*. The differences may have less to do with what is inherent in these works, however, and more to do with the stunning visual effects achieved by Mabou Mines in realizing *Worstward Ho* (there were none to speak of in *Company*).

The autobiographical narrator of *Worstward Ho* is still steeped in "The same dim, the same narrow void" we've visited him at before; but if anything, he seems closer to death and wishes for it that much more. He speaks of the failure of words ("How almost true they sometimes almost ring"), the failure of failure ("Fail again, fail better"), the price of life ("Remains of mine where none for the sake of pain" and "all cannot go till the dim go" and "Nothing ever unseen of the nothing to be seen"), as he fades in and out of consciousness ("Blanks—how long till somehow 'on' again?" and "No dim go, then all go").

What makes this dim, grim 50 minutes endurable are the theatrical effects of Mabou Mines. John Arnone has provided a set of a black mound that later comes into view as a pyramid. At first with a shovel as if he were digging his way to the surface, Mr. Neumann emerges through an opening in the center to narrate the piece. He's like some ghastly humanoid version of a hedgehog or a burrowing creature, but his usually mellifluous voice does justice to Beckett's fragmented language; his pauses and reflections guide us through some of the more incomprehensible passages. The remains of a human skeleton are imbedded in the surface of the mound near the cavernous opening, a skeleton which directly figures in the narration as well as suggests that, as usual, the time is after some nuclear catastrophe. When the narrator refers to "a body somehow standing in the dim void," the recollected body gradually assumes shape behind him as if it were floating or hovering just above the mound. Jennifer Tipton's brilliant lighting design makes the performer appear as if she were a hologram. Even more effective is the visual realization of "The old man and child" recalled by the narrator, who "plod on as one . . . hands held." Their backs to us behind the narrator who is facing us, they are walking slowly, perpetually, towards the top of the mound which now is a pyramid resembling a road in a surrealist painting by Dali or Magritte.

Whether or not the old man and child are Beckett's dim memory of Estragon and Vladimir, the key to Beckett remains what it always was—autobiography. He has been too obsessed with beating the cosmic void at its own game, by submitting to it, to expend any energies manufacturing fictions. Beckett understood sooner than his followers that the design of one's life, the situations and the circumstances, *are* fictions. In retrospect, it seems like the progress of Beckett's work will have documented the deterioration and death of his own mind.

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Certainly it's impossible to imagine it reaching more of a vegetable state than in *Worstward Ho*.

Well, oddly enough, 30 years after *Krapp's Last Tape* we're still here—or some of us are, anyway—dithering and blathering (Beckett more than the rest of us) and taking the aspirins that Beckett prescribed for us in his now famous letter to Alan Schneider.

During the run of JoAnne Akalaitis' controversial version of *Endgame* at Robert Brustein's American Repertory Theatre in the winter of 1984, I sent Brustein a copy of my disparaging review of the Alvin Epstein production which had opened in New York a few months earlier. Brustein responded in a letter, "Don't you find a certain affirmation and exhilaration in a playwright who courageously confronts the awful?" If by "certain" Mr. Brustein meant "perverted," then perhaps there is an "affirmation" in Beckett's work after all. But with the subsequent works as testimony to Beckett's diminutive sensibility, any earlier shreds of "exhilaration" have been erased altogether. For D.H. Lawrence, an image of the "hare erect" alone in a field was the supreme metaphor of perfect order in an otherwise chaotic world. For Virginia Woolf, it was the recurring, terrifying image of a fin on the crest of a wave. For Beckett, only the absence of the possibility can suffice.

David Kaufman is a theater critic in New York City.

POP CULTURE

Desire & Death

by Gary S. Vasilash

***Sid and Nancy*; directed by Alex Cox; written by Alex Cox and Abbe Wool; Samuel Goldwyn Company.**

Back in the days before OPEC became a notable force on American street corners, high school, for most of us growing up in Detroit, meant one thing: a driver's license. All we had to do was spend 12 weeks with a shop instructor, who was looking for a way to pick up a few extra bucks, in a Rambler Hornet, thoughtfully donated by a dealer who never dreamed of Renault. Then, the magic would be ours. Everything—from the drive-in theaters (now turned into strip malls) to the drive-in hamburger stands (now featuring a kiddy playland and ferns)—pointed toward the day when a set of car keys would be in hand, even if they were for a mother's four-door Valiant. The car meant freedom, not as in the wild anarchy of *On the Road*, but the freedom to be your own person, to go somewhere, or even nowhere, aimlessly driving up and down the same streets.

The driver's ed instructors weren't quite as dense as we liked to think. Before receiving the certificates that brought us very close to cruising Woodward Avenue or racing away from the lights on Telegraph Road, we were ushered into the school auditorium for a film that achieved semi-cult status: *Mechanized Death*. It's a documentary-style film that shows in unflinching detail the consequences of hurling 4,000-pound objects around with abandon. Blood, gore, screams, moans, death. Police officers shake their heads as they try to find meaning in the mayhem. Only metal pieces remain to be picked up. Twisted lives soak in the gasoline and oil.

The class of '72 was not without those who died at the wheel and those who survived, with significant changes, critical road accidents. But the larger part, those of us who were more cautious as we sped through the night, have made it unscathed, influenced in larger part, I suspect, by the sense-searing images of *Mechanized Death*.

Scenes from that movie came back to me as I watched *Sid and Nancy*, a "docu-drama" that details the relationship between Sid Vicious (born the more prosaic John Ritchie), onetime member of the Sex Pistols, and Nancy Spungen, a heroin-addicted groupie from Huntington, PA. Both are ugly people, not merely in a physical sense, though there's that, but in the way their lives unfold day after day like dirty sheets in a flophouse. They drive straight for destruction and doom, motivated only by their lust for pleasure and their sense of outsized self-importance. Even the nothing-sacred, saliva-stained Sex Pistols couldn't contain the maniacal energy of the two.

Although director Alex Cox, who co-wrote the screenplay with Abbe Wool, does his best to make the two characters seem more appealing than they no doubt really were (the real Spungen was sent to a mental institution at age 11, was a drug addict by 16, and had a stint as a New York City topless dancer on her resume; Vicious and the Sex Pistols were known more for their spitting beer on the audience and getting into fights than for any musical ability in more than a rudimentary sense), the utter vulgarity of the pair is too much to overcome. They are monsters in leather.

Early on, Nancy, played with a gusty whining by Chloe Webb, introduces Sid to the dubious pleasures of smack. This is not your conventional boy-meets-girl scenario. In one scene Nancy affixes a chain with a lock around Sid's neck. He asks where the key is. She replies, "What key?" Sid is stuck with the chain. With Nancy. And with the monkey on his back. Sid, portrayed by Gary Oldman, a Royal Shakespeare-trained actor who will undoubtedly be seen in less seamy roles, dies throughout the tale, although it is Nancy who bleeds to death in a cramped room in New York's Chelsea Hotel from a knife wound he's inflicted. (Sid died two months after Nancy: a heroin overdose.) The police, picking up the body and taking away Vicious, shake their heads in disgust. The audience does the same for over an hour-and-a-half.

In the years since gasoline has become somewhat dear, the automobile has never regained its status among the young. Detroit automakers are now returning to an anemic version of the "muscle car," though it is targeted at the upscale professionals, not the people who ached for the original Mustang, GTO, or Duster. The replacements for the car radio and the 8-track player are the music video and the boom box. Youth now dreams of escape through the life of a renegade rocker, whether it be Quiet Riot or some less-known local group of bad boys or girls. *Sid and Nancy* should become required viewing for them. It is *Mechanized Death* for a new generation.

Gary Vasilash is senior editor of Production *magazine.*

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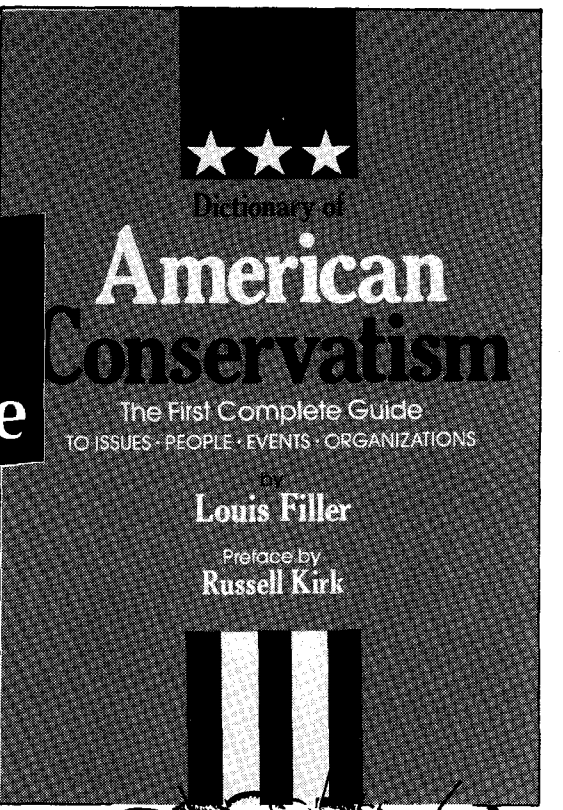

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